

THE INFAMOUS
JOHN FRIEND

MRS. R. S. GARNETT





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THE INFAMOUS JOHN FRIEND

BY

MRS. R. S. GARNETT



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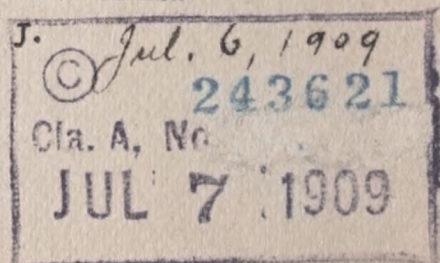
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THE INFAMOUS JOHN FRIEND

CHAPTER I

JOHN FRIEND AT HOME

MARY FRIEND lay ill in bed. The physician had just taken leave, shaking his head and pronouncing her in very serious danger. Her husband sat by her side, watching every rise and fall of her breath. She seemed to be asleep; but after a while she opened her eyes and fixed them on her husband.

"You were not here just now, love?" she asked.

"No, my dear. I went down with Dr. Thompson for a minute. He thinks you are going on famously. You are much better to-day, he says."

"Stay with me, dear. Don't leave me again."

"No, my love. Not another minute." He sat down in a chair facing her. "Where are your hands, Polly? Let me hold them."

He sought and found them under the bed-clothes;—slender wasted hands that lay in his, hot and trembling and powerless like little unfledged birds taken from the nest. His great muscular fingers folded tenderly over each. "There now, you have got me prisoner, eh Polly? Satisfied I can't escape for you again, are you?"

She smiled faintly and was silent. By-and-by she said, "Dearest, I think Dr. Thompson is wrong."

"How, Polly?"

"In thinking me better. I am very weak, my love. Sinking away. I believe—I believe the time has come when I must leave you."

"Not a bit of it, Polly; don't you believe it," said her husband with cheerful decision. "It's only your weakness which makes you feel as if you were sinking. You're all right; Dr. Thompson said so. Why, my little woman, do you think I'm going to let you die?"

"You can't help it, love," she murmured. "Say good-bye to me, dearest. You know I would have stayed with you if I could."

"Of course you'll stay, Polly. I'm not going to let you go. I've strength enough for two, and cunning greater than physicians' to cheat death when it's you he wants, my little woman. I'm not going to let you die. Don't you think it."

"Say good-bye to me, dearest love," she repeated, entreatingly. "I have loved you so dearly. You'll not forget me? You will still think of me when I am not with you?"

"Be quiet, Polly. You are not going to leave me, you little fool! As for forgetting you, I'm not the sort to change, am I? The world has never held any other woman than you for me, Polly, and neved will to my life's end. Forget you! I shan't have the chance, my dear. I'm not going to part with you; that's the long and short of it."

"It is not in your hands, dearest. Let me speak; I have so much to say."

"Well, say what you like, little woman. But it won't make any difference, you know, to your getting better. Why, you're stronger already, or you couldn't talk so much."

"I have tried, dearest, to be a good wife to you."

"And you've succeeded, Polly. You don't need me to tell you that?"

"I have not done what I would. I ought to have been better."

"Nonsense, Polly! I can't stand your accusing yourself. As if you weren't a whole universe too good for me!"

"But dearest—if we are to meet again——"

"Yes, Polly?"

"Let me hope that, my love! When I am no longer here——"

"I suppose you must have your say out, but you are not going."

"You will live in hope of seeing me again, love? You will be good?"

"You'd better stay and look after me yourself, Polly."

"I can do nothing. I have done nothing. Perhaps over there I can do more."

"Oh, no; don't you think it, love. I don't want a dead wife to think about; it's only a living one that will do me any good. Do you think I'm not the better for having you, my sweet? Why, every time I look at you, you put gentle thoughts into my head. I should be a sadly rough customer without you, my Polly. Don't you fret; but remember that it's you alive I want; that it's only living you can help me. Make up your mind to live for my sake if you want to reform me, dearest life. And now you've talked quite enough. Take your physic, and then you must go to sleep. Here it is. That's right! Now I'll hold your hands again; and you must remember I have you safe and don't mean to let you slip through my fingers. Trust me, Polly; I can hold you."

She smiled, and sighed; and then smiled again in answer to the tender concern of his face. She did not yet believe in his power to keep her, but she was too weak to protest; it was easier to surrender herself to him and repose on his strength. The same thing, or a variant of it, had happened many times before. The

history of her married life had been of a continuous struggle to bring her husband's mind into harmony with hers. Repeated failures had not taught her that it was a hopeless task. Beaten on one point, she took up a fresh position, always to be repulsed by his indulgent indifference. Yet his very insensibility had something in it to charm her, a sort of animal calm and strength that were soothing to her highly-strung temperament. It seemed to her that he grew the more lovable the more she disapproved. She hugged the thought that it was her duty to love him; to win him by obeying and pleasing. Her hope was that her prayers and the silent influence of her example might at last effect what her words could not do. Perhaps her death might awaken him; and in that thought she was glad to die. She was a woman whose whole life lay in the spiritual world; passionately moral, fervently religious. And through the curious attraction which contrasted temperaments often have for each other, her husband loved her the more for her unlikeness to himself.

He was a man of forty-seven, standing about five feet nine, built like a bullock for breadth and strength, so as to give the impression of being less than his height. For all his massiveness of frame he yet had an appearance of great activity; and a martial suggestion in his carriage, an indefinable hint in his countenance, inspired the thought "A most formidable antagonist." It could hardly be his expression that conveyed this veiled threat, for it was one mainly of humorous intelligence, yet showing resolution and command. Some people have an odd resemblance to certain animals; and though there was nothing vulpine about Friend's bullet head, square jaw and massive brow, yet a look of sly cheerful cunning, and something latent that might prove to be ferocity, reminded one on seeing him in no small degree of a fox.

Friend's prediction was verified on the physician's

visit the next morning; he found the patient keeping up her strength well, and more comfortable. She had passed a peaceful night. He congratulated her husband as they exchanged a few words downstairs before he left. "Ah, if all my patients were as well tended as Mrs. Friend is, I should get the credit for more cures than I do," he said. "You are a wonderful nurse, Mr. Friend."

Dr. Thompson laughed good-humoredly. "Adieu sir; I must hurry away. I shall be here again to-night, when I trust this happy improvement may continue. Your servant, sir."

Friend let him out and entered the parlor on the right. "Susan!" he said. There was no reply. He went round the table until he could command a view of the interior of a high-backed armchair which stood with its back to the door. A girl sat in it deeply immersed in a book.

"So, Miss Sukey!" he said, "you are there, lost in your books as usual?"

"Yes, daddy," she said, laying down her volume and rising from her seat, as well-brought-up young people a hundred years ago were trained to do when their elders addressed them.

"Is that jelly ready yet for your aunt, my love?" he asked. "She might like it for her dinner."

"Not quite, Daddy. It has not set yet."

"What a long time it takes to set, Sukey. I'm afraid the skill of the cook was to seek. Did you drop your jelly bag on the floor while you were dreaming over your books instead of minding your cookery?"

"Oh no, Daddy; I don't think of books when I'm making a jelly."

"I'll wager you do, then. You think of nothing else, you lazy slut. Your little head is stuffed with 'em. What is it you have there now? Fairy tales?"

"Fairy tales forsooth!" she exclaimed indignantly.

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"What is this, then? '*Evelina, or a Young Lady's Entrance into the World.*' And what sort of a work is this?"

"I don't know what you call it, Daddy. It's a story; a romance, I suppose; a novel."

"A romance! A novel, indeed! Very novel too for your time of life. Why, Sukey, how old do you call yourself, child?"

"I shall be sixteen next week, Daddy."

"Sixteen next week! How time does fly, to be sure! So here's *la petite Suzanne* filling her head with romances and thinking herself grown up already!"

"Do you think I'm too young, Daddy?" asked Susan anxiously.

"Too young, Sukey? We can't control our ages, my dear; they come on us unawares. It is a surprise to me, for I have seen you, as I thought, such a child still; so careless of others, so wrapped up in your own little world of toys and dreams. I'd no notion you were thinking all this while of Young Ladies' Entrances into the World. I suppose you'll be thinking about your own entrance to the world before long."

"Oh, no, Daddy. I am quite happy as I am with you and aunt."

"Are you, my dear? But for how long, I wonder?—Well, child, look after that jelly. And by-and-by I shall want you to go and sit with your aunt. I am going to her now; but I have to go out after dinner. So you must act nurse a bit, love. I shan't be more than an hour gone."

He returned to his post. It was not without good cause that he quitted it for more than a few minutes, for his wife visibly flagged whenever he left her. Susan was of no great use in the sick-room. Many girls of her age are skilful nurses; but she was hitherto without that comprehension of another's suffering which, if it be not the result of experience, is the sign of a nature at once prac-

tical and unselfish. Susan was not selfish; she had an excellent heart. It was her outward faculties, her attention, which were in fault.

She was a waif of the French Revolution. Her family had perished in the Terror when she was a child of four. But that was twelve long years ago; and Suzanne de Marny remembered little or nothing of her French life. She was plain Susan Marny now, and passionately English in her sympathies with the great national struggle which was drawing to its acutest phase. There was still something slightly foreign about her, just enough to suggest that she had inherited the best gifts of both countries. She had been an exquisitely lovely child, and was now growing into an exceedingly pretty girl; and, perhaps owing to her French blood, without any of the awkwardness which frequently marks the English girl's transition to womanhood.

Gradually Mrs. Friend recovered strength; but she was a delicate woman, and her convalescence was a slow one. It was a great occasion when she came downstairs for the first time. Her husband was in the highest spirits, and made it a veritable triumph. No one could be a more entertaining companion than Friend when his spirits were raised. He joked and laughed; he imitated foreigners in a way that provoked peals of laughter even from his wife. He did a German apostrophising his sausage and his beer, and although neither Mrs. Friend nor Susan knew the language, they found the tones, gestures, and grimaces unmistakable and irresistible; a dialogue between two Irishmen concerning a pig; and lastly, a scene between a drunken Parisian coachman and a stall keeper of the *Halles*; all delivered with such dramatic power and wealth of comic observation as would have drawn crowds to hear him on the stage. They had at last to beg him to stop in mercy to their aching sides.

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"O Daddy!" cried Susan, almost sobbing with laughter. "Where did you learn all this? You speak French exactly like a Frenchman; you make me feel as if I were four years old again. When you talk like that, I remember the sound so well!"

"Daddy Friend was a great deal in Paris last century, you know, my love," said Mrs. Friend.

"I know it was you who brought me over. But you were not in Paris all through the Revolution?"

"I was there some months in 1793. There were a good few English people there, even at the worst of it. We had to keep ourselves pretty close, but there was a pleasant little circle meeting at a few friends' houses; there was Mrs. Christie, and the great Tom Paine, and that fine woman Mrs. Wollstonecraft."

"My love, do not name such people to the child," remonstrated Mrs. Friend.

"Oh, you can't stand Tom Paine, can you Polly? But as for Mary Wollstonecraft, I always had a great admiration for her, Captain Gilbert Imlay notwithstanding. She was a splendid woman, and you'd have said so yourself if you had ever seen her, Polly."

"She was not a woman I could ever have met except accidentally," said Mrs. Friend rather primly. "Let us change the subject, my dear. Tell Susan how you used to bring the emigrants over in the time of the Terror."

"Nay, dear, I'll tell you instead my plan for the future. Here you are down among us once more; you'll soon be on your feet again now; and as soon as you can bear the journey we'll take you down to Brighthelmstone to complete your recovery. Hey, Polly? What do you think of a little sea-bathing to set you up? And we'll show Susan a little of the gay world, eh?"

"Oh!" cried Susan in rapture. "To see the sea! Do you really mean it, Daddy?"

Mrs. Friend did not seem equally delighted. She only

said, "Brighthelmstone? It's a long journey, isn't it, my love?"

"Why, no length at all; not more than an active man can walk in a day. It's only fifty miles. The coach would take you there in ten or twelve hours; but you shan't go by coach, Polly. You shall have your own carriage, and go down in proper style like a lady—sleep on the road if you like, and arrive without the least fatigue."

"My own carriage, dear! You are not thinking of setting up a carriage?"

"You shall have a carriage, Polly, confound me if you shan't; and Sukey here shall have as many new gowns as she has a mind for, and I'll see you two ruffling it with the best society in Brighthelmstone. So now you know your fate, madam!"

"You are not serious, my love, surely?"

"As sure as my name's John Friend I am, Polly. Come, you will like to go? Sukey, you will like to see a little of the gay world at Brighthelmstone?"

"O Daddy, Daddy. I should delight in it!" cried Susan ecstatically.

"That's settled then," said Friend; and his wife for the moment submitted.

But on being alone with her husband the next day she reopened the subject. "Surely, my love, you were joking when you spoke of taking us to Brighthelmstone?"

"Joking? Never less so in my life!"

"But, my dear, have you considered it well? Perhaps there might be no objection to the mere visit; but to go in such a style—to buy a carriage for the occasion——"

"Well, Polly, why not? Many a common drudge of a city merchant keeps his carriage; why should not we?"

"If your fortune allows it——"

"It does allow it, Polly; that and far more."

"It must be for you to decide, my love, not me. You

know best what you can afford. But you will recollect it is not the first time you have launched into extravagances that we have not been able to support."

Friend laughed, not quite pleasantly.

"Well, Polly, if that's to be the case again, then let's be merry while we may," he said. "But the luck will last this time, my dear; have no fear of that."

"Dearest," said Mrs. Friend, her eyes filling with tears, "if you knew how painful all this display and extravagance is to me—this feeling of insecurity, not knowing where the money comes from, nor how long it will last—and then to go into society not knowing on what footing we stand nor by what right we mix with our associates—if you knew how—how miserable it makes me——" She could not command her voice to finish her sentence; and was silent, struggling with her tears.

"Nonsense, Polly," said Friend peremptorily. "Don't raise imaginary objections to my wishes. You have the right of any other woman of good family and breeding to mix with her equals in fortune and position. Don't talk nonsense, my love; your illness has lowered you till you are scared at less than a shadow. There, give me a kiss and cheer up, little woman; you must not be so diffident and distrustful. Cheer up and smile again; you know I would not hurt you for the world."

She wiped her eyes and tried to obey him; but there was another objection in her mind, which when her voice was better under control, she brought forward.

"And there's another point, dearest," she said. "Don't be angry with me; but have you thought of your plan with reference to Susan? She is beginning to grow up now, and is becoming a very pretty girl. Will it be wise to introduce her to society at Brighthelmstone, so young as she is, with the Prince of Wales there and all his dissolute companions?"

"But you will be with her, love."

“And you. Oh, it’s not that I anticipate any harm from want of protection; but supposing she falls in love?”

“What, as soon as she sets her eyes on a young fellow? Polly, is that your opinion of your sex?”

“Not perhaps at the first moment, but certainly sooner or later. You have made plans for her future, I suppose. Will it suit them for her to marry so soon? Or is it perhaps your plan to marry her to some one now at Brighthelmstone?” She seemed struck with a sudden idea; her face blanched. “Friend! If you are going to make that child an instrument——”

“No, no, Polly!” he said reassuringly. “Don’t think of it. Her happiness would always be my first consideration. Can’t you trust me as far as that, my love?”

She sank down again and covered her face with her hands. “Forgive me, love,” she said. “I ought to trust you; but trust is hard when one knows so little. If you would trust me more——”

“Well, dearest, about the child. Should you be sorry to see her married?”

“It would depend, of course, on the man. I should be very jealous for my sweet Susan. I would not part with her to any one I did not thoroughly trust. Nor if he were found should I wish her to marry yet. She is a mere child still, quite unawakened.”

“She is beginning to stir, dear love, in her sleep. She will soon awake, sooner perhaps than you think. That is the reason I want to show her a little of life. She has had a quiet time here with you; now when she is growing up we should not be dealing fairly with her if we kept her shut up and buried alive all her days.”

“But what if she should become discontented with out quiet life? Would it not then be a cruelty?”

“Nay, Polly, she is a good girl; she is thine own pupil, thine own adopted daughter. She will not long be dis-

contented with her home.—Tell me,” he said, after a pause, “do you really think she is likely to marry, so young as she is?”

Mrs. Friend pondered. “That she is likely to have many admirers I am certain,” she replied. “But will they touch her heart? How can one tell? She is of French blood, and may have some harmlessly coquettish strain; I fancy she may have; and then there is a certain safety in numbers. And she is very young still. On the whole, my love, I think the ordeal will be harmless.”

“I am glad you think so, my dear. Yet, after all, it may be best for the child to marry early.”

CHAPTER II

AT BRIGHTON

A HANDSOME chariot was bought; and in it Friend and his wife, with Susan and their devoted maid Betty, posted down to Brighton. They spent one night at Reigate to save fatigue; and about five in the afternoon of the next day rattled over the cobblestones of East Street, through Castle Square, and drew up in front of one of the handsomest mansions on the Steine. Men servants threw open the door and hurried forward to hand the ladies out of the carriage. They entered a spacious hall, richly furnished in the barbarous taste of the period, with plaster columns painted to imitate marble, and grained woodwork, and a vast quantity of gilding. Susan looked about her with astonishment. She had seen a good many changes of residence and variations of their mode of living while under the care of the Friends, but never anything like this. Mrs. Friend too seemed surprised. Her husband smiled. "My friend Lord Mountstephen lends me the house," he said; "and the servants are hired for our stay here. I must have your property attended while in Brighthelmstone, my love."

"Daddy Friend, you are a magician, I believe!" exclaimed Susan. "Or are you someone in disguise? Do you think he is really some foreign prince, or a noble duke or earl, dear aunt?"

Mrs. Friend smiled. Her husband burst into a roar of laughter, and rallied Susan long about her foreign prince in disguise.

She did not think much of the subject, however. Her head was full of her own concerns, which were mainly dreams; and she took the various mysteries of her guardian's avocations with perfect calm. She supposed things were always so in "affairs." This was the term used by Friend whenever it became necessary to speak of his employment. But the usual tenor of their life was that of the quieter professional classes; and now it appeared that they were to launch into fashionable life. Friend himself was quite unchanged. He was always the same in all surroundings and with all conditions of men. He took Susan out for a walk in the morning, eager for her first view of the sea. Mrs. Friend was keeping her room after the fatigues of the journey. It was a different scene indeed from the Brighton of our day. The landscape was all Downs and sea; the little town dominated by its square towered church clustered among hayfields and cornfields. But rows of houses were beginning to spread like extended fingers among the fields, and the roads showed signs of traffic beyond the uses of country lanes. Over at Hove the white tents of the military camp shone in the sun, and glimpses of scarlet and flashes of burnished metal occasionally struck the eye. But the great glittering plain of the sea absorbed all Susan's attention. She had no eyes for the streets, delightfully clean after the filth of London, nor for the sunshine glowing on the red brick pavements and working color harmonies between them and the dappled grey flint work of the walls. The vivid green, the well kept turf of the Steine contrasted with the bright rust colored meshes of the fishermen's nets spread over its seaward end to dry; picturesque fishing boats were drawn up on the shingle of the beach; children were paddling and digging in the sand. A row of bathing machines stood in the shallow water, while stalwart females, gowned in faded indigo blue serge, were standing waist deep in the sea

and "dipping" the ladies and children who entrusted themselves to their care. Friend told Susan she must make the acquaintance of Martha Gunn, the celebrated bathing woman of the place. They went in search of her. She was engaged, but by-and-by came bustling up. "Wanted, am I? And bless the young lady's pretty face, does she want to bathe? And so she shall, the pretty dear, and none but old Martha shall have the dipping of her, the pretty innocent. It was Lady Betty Stanhope that kept me; she's always so long in the water, is Lady Betty; but there, no one'll do for her la'ship but old Martha. They all asks for old Martha, sir; and it's me as'll dip the sweet lamb here as gently as a babe. Come along, my pretty; come with old Martha."

She was a stout, cheerful old woman, with a broad beaming face looking out from the frills of her large cap underneath a bonnet, with such an open, kindly expression that Susan surrendered herself into her hands without reluctance. She did not quite perceive the necessity for a bathing attendant to take her by the shoulders and bob her down into the water, but it was at the period the regulation way for ladies to enjoy sea bathing; so she resigned herself to undergo it like the rest. When it was over, and damp and sticky but exhilarated she rejoined Friend, she found him somewhat annoyed by discovering that the full swing of the season would not begin for another month. True, there were visitors in plenty; but chiefly family parties and patients resorting there for their health. Mrs. Fitzherbert was staying at her house to recruit after an indisposition, and there was a sprinkling of fashionables fluttering around her; but the Pavilion was empty; no entertainments or concerts were going forward, and Mr. Wade, Master of Ceremonies, had not yet arrived.

"Never mind, dear Daddy," said Susan; "we shall be

very happy without balls and concerts; and I dare say we shall find plenty of nice acquaintances among these people on the beach."

"But I intend to mind, Sukey. I must at least see if the lady I hope will introduce you is in Brighton. Come into Donaldson's Library."

He drew her into that fashionable resort, almost a club-room, where the quality met daily for cards and gossip as well as for the exchange of books. On consulting the visitors' list he found the lady he wanted, Lady Anne Craven, was at her house; and his annoyance passed off. The shop was crowded with knickknacks and trinkets, china, lace, painted fans, ribbons, and muslins. Susan looked at the pretty things with delight; but what was her astonishment when Friend put a banknote for twenty pounds into her hand, and told her to spend it on making herself smart! She had never possessed a sum larger than a guinea in her life, and felt quite embarrassed at so much wealth. She bought a real lace veil for herself and a pair of gloves for her aunt, the prices of which were discussed with much mystery and meaning, whereby Friend told her she was to know the articles were smuggled.

In the afternoon Friend called on Lady Anne Craven, who owned a small house next to Mrs. Fitzherbert's on the Steine. Lady Anne's sister had married the Comte de Nérac, who had emigrated to England early in the Revolution, but his wife and family, who remained in hopes of quieter times, owed their escape to Friend. It was he who brought them over in safety to Lady Anne's house in town. She professed herself pleased to renew his acquaintance; and when she heard where his wife and ward were staying, graciously consented to call upon them.

She came the next day, when Friend happened to be out. Her manner at first was a little lofty, but she soon

thawed beneath the influence of Mrs. Friend's ladylike manners and Susan's charm. She was a good-natured woman, very fond of young people, and a great admirer of beauty; and the standard of Brighton with regard to birth was by no means so exacting as that of London. She soon learned that Mrs. Friend's father had been Dean of Lincoln, and that after his death, which happened early, she had been brought up by his brother, Mr. Henry Norman, who held the position of Clerk to the House of Commons. "But I quarreled with my family when I married Mr. Friend," she said, "and I have not seen any of my relations since. My uncle died five years ago."

"But Mr. Friend is of good family himself, I have always understood?" asked Lady Anne.

"I must confess I do not know any particulars about his family. His father was, I believe, undoubtedly entitled to a large fortune, but he was ruined in a long lawsuit about it with another branch—with which, of course, we have never had any intercourse. Mr. Friend has had to make his own way entirely; and he never builds on his birth or family connections."

"But, my dear madam, if he is of good blood he has a claim that can't be withstood. I am pleased at any rate to find you are so respectably connected. I see you're a family I shall have pleasure in knowing while you're at Brighton; and I hope you'll let me have the pleasure of introducing your charming niece to our society here."

"You are very good, your ladyship. If my health were stronger I should wish to escort her myself; but I fear I am not equal to it."

"I shall be delighted to take her out, ma'am. I love young people, especially when they have such good looks and pretty manners as Miss here. She does your training credit, ma'am."

"It is very good of your ladyship to say so."

Lady Anne lost no time in asking Friend to bring Susan to spend an evening at her house. Though the town was not full, there was a good deal of company. There was Lady Amelia Spencer, and the Earl and Countess Craven, brother and sister-in-law of Lady Anne; there was Mrs. Creevey and her three daughters by a former marriage, the Misses Ord—Mr. Creevey as a member of Parliament was kept in town; there was Captain Berkeley of the Sea Fencibles, and Colonel Benson of the militia; there was Lady Anne's cousin, Mr. Thomas Raby, M.P., nephew and heir of Lord Sandown. "Quite of the right principles, Mr. Friend," whispered Lady Anne on introducing the last. "Brighton is a horrid Whiggish place, I must confess; but we try to forget politics here. We are all friends at Brighton."

Mr. Raby was a handsome, rather stiff-looking young man of about twenty-seven. He begged for the honor of an introduction to Susan, round whom the young men were clustering like flies round a honey pot. She indeed was looking ravishingly pretty. Mr. Raby could not find an opportunity of gaining her attention. For some time he stood behind the sofa where she sat, trying unsuccessfully to enter the conversation. At last Friend approached him.

"Lady Anne tells me you are a colonel of Volunteers, Mr. Raby."

"Yes, sir. I think it is every Englishman's duty to do all he can for the defense of his country at the present crisis of affairs. I have thrown myself into the Volunteer movement with all my strength."

"A most praiseworthy work," said Friend. "It interests me greatly. Is your regiment stationed at Hove, may I ask?"

"No, sir, it is at Folkestone. I am not able to do much for it during the Session, but I devote all my spare time

to it when the House is not sitting. Our leader Mr. Pitt sets us an excellent example."

"Indeed he does. And what do you think of the prospects of an invasion, Mr. Raby?"

"Why, sir, I believe it depends on ourselves. If we show ourselves careless about our defenses, I imagine we shall have Bonaparte down upon us directly. He is only waiting for an opportunity."

"I have heard some who ought to be able to form an opinion say that he is too much engrossed in his new honors as Emperor and getting himself crowned in Italy to think of invasion at present."

"Only a blind, sir. Nothing will content the voracious ambition of that man. Depend upon it, he is as much bent on the subjugation of England as ever he was."

"You may be right, sir. In that case it behooves us to look to our defenses. What do you think of the Martello towers along the southeastern coast?"

Mr. Raby had much to say, and the conversation lasted for some time; till, seeing a space for a moment at Susan's side, he seized on it and deserted Friend and the subject of the Volunteers.

Friend was amused to see the ease and grace with which Susan accepted her new position as a belle of fashion. She was simplicity and modesty itself; no touch of affectation or conceit appeared, but neither was there the least awkwardness or shyness. Her French blood showed itself in her social gifts; no English girl brought up as she had been in utter seclusion would have been able to bear herself so well. Lady Anne was delighted with her. "Why, she is a pearl, a paragon, your little Miss Marny!" she exclaimed. "You must let her be with me often; I must show her everywhere. Never fear that I will not take care of her. I will guard her well."

They returned well pleased to Mrs. Friend, Susan

overflowing with delight and excitement. She repeated to her aunt all the fine things that had been said to her, ending always with, "Could they really have meant it, dear aunt?"

Mrs. Friend assured her they did not; but Susan's pleasure could not be spoiled.

Mr. Raby came very soon to call. He was evidently very much struck with Susan, and though he had not a great flow of conversation nor a facility in paying compliments, it seemed to Friend that his admiration had a deeper root than that of her more voluble followers. He talked the matter over with his wife. "What do you think of young Raby, my love? How should you like him for a husband for Susan?"

"My dearest life! I have seen him but once. What can I know of him?"

"He seems to me an honest young fellow. He has good Tory principles, at any rate; that ought to recommend him to you, Polly."

"If he holds them conscientiously and intelligently, they are a recommendation truly," said Mrs. Friend; "but political principles do not go very far towards making a woman's happiness. I think he seems rather cold in his temper."

"Perhaps the warmer when his heart is reached, Polly. He is nephew and heir to Lord Sandown, and will be very wealthy when he succeeds to the title. And he has a pretty fortune already from his mother, Lady Louisa Dalkeith."

"My dear, what are rank and money to me? They would only remove my Susan quite out of my reach."

"Don't you be too sure of that, Polly. Because we have lived poorly hitherto, don't suppose it must always be your fate. You might lose Susan more irretrievably if you married her to some obscure clergyman or professional drudge."

"There is always safety in obscurity, dearest."

"And safety is all you care about. Poor Polly!" He kissed her hand. "Never mind, my love. Safety and greatness sometimes go together. I own I rather incline to see Susan Countess of Sandown."

"My love, what claim has Susan to so brilliant a match? A girl without fortune, without family——"

"What do you know of her family, my dear? And as for fortune, I have put by a few shillings for her," said Friend dryly.

"I was thinking of her as our own daughter. You are right, my love; I know nothing of her family, no more than I do of your true position and employments." She spoke with some bitterness, of which her husband took no notice.

"Seriously, Polly, the alliance might be useful to me. I have not yet decided on it, and I want your opinion of the young man as to whether he is likely to make the child happy. Study him and let me know what you think of him. I will take no one for her that you do not approve of, my love; comfort yourself with that assurance."

So Mrs. Friend took pains to become acquainted with Mr. Raby.

CHAPTER III

HOW THEY WENT TO THE REVIEW

MR. RABY certainly afforded ground for Friend's expectations, by his assiduity in calling, and the attentions he paid to Susan. He could hardly take his eyes off her, and did his best to converse with her; but the very anxiety with which he sought for suitable topics stood in his way; and she found him rather stupid. Usually Mrs. Friend came to the rescue, and to her he held forth at length on the subject of the Volunteers, his veneration for Pitt, and the wicked malignancy of the Whigs' attack on Lord Melville. Mrs. Friend grew at length to feel rather warmly towards him. His admiration for Susan and his sincere though awkward attempts to interest her touched her heart. He was evidently an earnest politician and deeply convinced of his party principles; and though not brilliant, he was an honest, painstaking worker, of steady character, and not without intelligence. She was intensely interested in all he had to say about the Volunteer movement and the defense of the coast. Whatever principles Mrs. Friend accepted she held with fervor; and since she regarded loyalty to the king and patriotism as duties, she was prepared to throw herself into the struggle with Napoleon with all her strength, and to make any sacrifice that might come in her way. She was thus eager to accept when Mr. Raby begged to have the honor of escorting the ladies to a military review to be held at Lewes. It was to be a grand

occasion; the Prince of Wales was coming down for it, and Mr. Pitt, who as Warden of the Cinque Ports had been the soul of the Volunteer movement in Kent, was also able to be present. The expedition would be more fatiguing than anything Mrs. Friend had yet done, but she was gaining strength rapidly, and believed she would be equal to it. She wished to go, and therefore was confident she could. Susan, too, was full of enthusiasm for any military spectacle. Friend was likewise well pleased to accept, so it was arranged without demur on any side.

It was a beautiful day. Susan, looking lovely in a white muslin gown, with a short French mantle of pink sarsenet over her shoulders, and a gipsy hat tied with a pink ribbon, mounted Mr. Raby's curricie, while Mr. and Mrs. Friend and Lady Anne followed in the chariot of the latter. Lady Anne had rallied her cousin a little on his admiration for Susan. "Mind you don't get caught, Thomas, before you know what you're about. She's a charming girl, I admit, and as lovely as an angel; but what's her family and fortune? You must not throw yourself away, my dear cousin."

"I imagine you were satisfied that her family is respectable before you admitted her to your acquaintance," replied Mr. Raby.

"Oh, her family is decent enough, but not equal to yours, Tom. Mr. Friend appears to be a self-made man, but he comes of a good stock. Wasn't there a Sir John Friend who distinguished himself somehow in William III.'s time?"

"Are you thinking of Sir John Friend the Jacobite, who was executed for high treason in 1695?"

"I suppose I was; I had quite forgotten what he did. Dear me, dear me! Well, that's quite a creditable way of ending; one may say so now. But we don't know, after all, if it was the same family. Mrs. Friend at any

rate is very respectably connected. They pass very well for Brighton acquaintances, but that does not make them fit for an alliance with the Sandown family, Tom. Besides, the girl is only an adopted daughter. Heaven only knows what her birth is."

"After all, birth is not the only qualification," said Mr. Raby. "But do not be alarmed, my dear cousin. I have not the slightest intention of marrying at present."

So Lady Anne allowed Mr. Raby to drive Susan in his curricule; though she put no very great faith in his assurances. Still, she knew she could rely on Tom's steady sense. He was not given to acting on impulse, and the time had not come for further interference.

The review was a splendid spectacle. The Prince was there, with Mrs. Fitzherbert at his side; there was the Russian ambassador and the renowned French general, Dumouriez; there were notabilities such as the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, the Duke of Portland, Lord Eldon, and the great Pitt, all three members of the Cabinet. Of the other party there was the celebrated Richard Brinsley Sheridan, amicably chatting with the Prince of Wales; and Fox, keeping his distance from Mrs. Fitzherbert. There were famous beauties such as Lady Jersey and the Duchess of Devonshire; there were many sporting friends of the Prince such as Sir John Lade, Captain Crampton, Captain Barclay, and Mr. Mellish. Mr. Raby did his duty in pointing out the celebrities to Susan, but it is to be feared that she was more interested in the military spectacle and the splendor of the general scene than in what he considered the center of attraction—the members of the Cabinet present and in especial the slight, still figure of William Pitt.

The soldiers in their tall hats with bristling plumes marched and countermarched, drums banged, trumpets

brayed, banners waved, gallant officers on splendid chargers galloped about; the spectators huzzaed, everyone shouted, and in short there was all the noise, dust, heat, and confusion that could be demanded for the most brilliant review. Susan's enthusiasm was stirred to the depths. The sound of the bugles signaling a charge, the apparently irresistible onset of the masses of men all moving like one, thrilled her blood. "Oh, how splendid they are!" she exclaimed. "To think of all these gallant fellows, every one of them ready to give his life for his country! What heroes they are!"

"And do you indeed consider a soldier's life so much more admirable than any other, Miss Marny?" inquired her companion.

"Certainly I do under the present circumstances, when our country is in daily dread of invasion," replied Susan. "I think it is the most glorious thing in the world to be a soldier. But, of course, every one cannot be a soldier, and the next best thing is to volunteer. I wonder every man does not volunteer. I would, if I were a man."

"Would you, indeed, Miss Marny? I admire your spirit."

"I would, indeed. I wish I were a man. When I think of foreigners invading these shores, and Bonaparte dreaming that he can conquer England, I long to be a man to strike a blow at them."

"Leave that to us, Miss Marny. There is one arm at least that will strike with its utmost strength, and that will receive new power from the thought of your sympathy."

"Oh! how I envy you men! You don't think me very hard-hearted and unfeminine for saying so, I hope, Mr. Raby? Of course, being only a female, I should not really like to fight, even if I could; but I wish I had been born a man."

"I think you show a most charming spirit, and are in every respect what a female should be," said Mr. Raby with awkward warmth. He always turned stiffer in the act of paying a compliment, which was really testimony to his sincerity; but it unfortunately destroyed the effect of his pretty speeches. Susan thought him awkward and stupid.

At the conclusion of the spectacle, however, he found he had enjoyed everything amazingly. Mrs. Friend and Lady Anne, being tired, went to rest in a cottage near, where curds and whey and other rustic refreshments were to be had; while Mr. Raby, Friend, and Susan walked about among the dispersing spectators, nodding to acquaintances and interchanging congratulatory remarks. Presently they found themselves close to Mr. Pitt, who at that moment turned and recognized Mr. Raby. "Ah, Raby; your servant, sir," said the great man. "Your most obedient, Mr. Pitt. A splendid review, sir," said Raby, and then seizing the opportunity, "May I have the honor of introducing Mr. Friend?"

Pitt looked keenly at Friend, who bowed and remarked, "I believe I already have the honor of being known to Mr. Pitt."

"Ah, indeed! I did not recognize you for the moment, Mr. Friend," said Pitt coldly.

"Mr. Friend is staying in Brighton with his family," said Raby, as Pitt made no further remark. "He is much interested in military matters and our Volunteer movement."

"Indeed. Are you a Volunteer yourself, sir?"

"No, sir; I cannot command sufficient leisure," replied Friend. And then some important personage on his other side addressed Pitt, and he turned away, saying to Raby over his shoulder, "I shall see you next week in the House, Raby, I presume?"

"So that is the great Mr. Pitt!" exclaimed Susan,

when they were out of earshot. "He looks worn and ill."

"He has felt the scandalous attack on Lord Melville acutely," said Raby. "On the night Mr. Whitbread's resolution against him was carried—the night the Speaker gave his casting-vote against us—magnificent as his self-command is on ordinary occasions, I assure you the tears were trickling down his cheeks. I was standing close to him, and I saw them. It has been an infamous business."

"H'm!" said Friend dryly. "But no one impeaches Lord Melville's personal honor."

"'Twould be impossible to do so—impossible to all, that is, but those infamous and venomous followers of Fox, men who themselves understand the meaning neither of honor nor of honesty," said Raby.

Susan, who had never heard of Lord Melville and did not know of what he was accused, ventured to inquire of her uncle. "Lord Melville, love, was First Lord of the Admiralty and Treasurer of the Navy, and has been accused in Parliament of want of proper care in the administration of the public money," he replied. Mr. Raby eagerly supplemented the information. Like all members of Parliament at that time he was engrossed in the subject, and he inflicted on Friend a long and minute account of all the proceedings, and all the opinions of the principal members of the Government. Poor Susan was heartily tired of Lord Melville's name before they rejoined the elder ladies to return to Brighton.

But she had had enough of interest to last her for many days, or even months or years of her old quiet life. She had seen the great Pitt, "the Pilot that weathered the storm," face to face; and had discovered that her uncle was of his acquaintance, though not as it appeared so intimately as to afford him any particular pleasure

in the meeting. She ventured to hint as much to Mr. Raby on the homeward drive. "Mr. Pitt's manners are always reserved," he replied. "He has the reputation of being dry and haughty in his deportment. I cannot myself think the accusation deserved; he has always been kindness and affability itself to me."

Lord Sandown, however, was a neighbor of Pitt's at Walmer Castle; his estates in the district were very large. Besides, there was a connection between the Raby family and the Edens, with whom Pitt would once have been glad to have allied himself had he felt his fortune sufficient to support a wife in the style he thought proper to his position: so that Mr. Thomas Raby belonged to the charmed circle within which Pitt's haughty manners never showed themselves.

The review took place about ten days after their arrival at Brighton; and the next day, seeing that his wife had borne the fatigue very well, Friend announced that he must immediately leave them. He had affairs, he said, that were urgently demanding his attention. He had already lost valuable time through his wife's illness; he could now delay no longer. They would be quite safe and comfortable without him, having made friends among the best Brighton society.

Mrs. Friend had had no idea that he would not be able to stay with them for the whole visit; and was quite overcome at hearing it. She was naturally of a nervous constitution, and had become more timorous and fearful through her ill health. She had schooled herself to bear his frequent absences in general without complaint, but this occasion was a special injury; she felt she had been brought to Brighton on false pretenses. "I never would have consented to come if I had not understood you would be with me," she reproached him.

"Nay, my dearest life, I hoped I could have managed

a longer stay," replied Friend apologetically. "And you know the air is doing you so much good. It would have been a thousand pities if you had not come."

"You cannot really mean to leave me alone in this strange place with the child on my hands?" she demanded.

"What can you fear, my dearest? You have a houseful of servants to protect you. The house you are in alone entitles you to respect; Lord Mountstephen's name is a guarantee for your safety. What possible cause for apprehension can you have?"

She could not say; but visions of hostility and insult floated vaguely before her eyes. In the depths of her mind was a misgiving lest she might be called to account for assuming a position to which she had no right; of being branded as an adventurer. She had no confidence in her husband's title to mix with this kind of society: but she dared not acknowledge this to him.

"There are those dreadful dissolute companions of the Prince of Wales," she said.

"But he is not in Brighton, my love. He only came down to Lewes for the review, and his Hangers and Lades will go back with him. Cheer up and be a sensible little woman. I will return at the earliest possible minute. You know it is only the gravest matters that take me away from you."

"Dearest, tell me what your errand is. Let me know something of its nature. I could let you go—oh how readily and joyfully, if I knew its importance. You don't distrust me, dearest life? You don't believe me unfit to be trusted with a secret? Think how long I have kept silence and never asked a question, lest you should fancy me actuated by idle womanish curiosity. It is not that, husband; it is no mere curiosity that makes me ask. It affects my happiness, my confidence in you. For what must I think—what conclusion must

I be forced to, when you will not let me—me your wife—know where you go, nor what you do, nor how you make your money?”

“Well, Polly?” he challenged her. “And what is your conclusion?”

“That it is something of which you are ashamed—that you make your money by unlawful means,” she said, looking him straight in the eyes.

“That’s a rash conclusion, my darling,” he replied, trying to laugh. “Do you fancy me a highwayman, then, and suppose I go out on the roads and take purses? No, my dear; my trade is political, and you have enough sense to see that political secrets are not things to be talked about, even to one’s wife.”

“But without talking about them, without divulging any secret, you could surely let me know where you are going and the nature of your errand. Is it Parliamentary business? Has it to do with the war? Will it take you into danger?”

“Ah, now you want to know the whole story. Just like a woman; as soon as I drop a single word you’re on me for the whole. You’re all alike; give you an inch and you’ll take an ell.”

“But, dearest love, you have really told me nothing. Of course I know your employment is political.”

“Well, Polly; and will not that content you?”

“It must, dearest, if you will tell me no more. But that knowledge does not satisfy me why you must leave me now. Tell me this at least, husband; will your errand take you into any danger?”

“Danger? No, my love, no more than the ordinary course of business always involves. Men of affairs are not quite as exempt from danger as shopkeepers behind their counters; but you needn’t suppose I’m sure to be pistoled by a highwayman or get my neck broken by a fall from my horse because I travel about.”

"No, my dear, I hope not. I was not thinking of danger of that nature."

"Of what then, Polly?"

"I hardly know; dangers from the enemy, perhaps; only you seem to bear a charmed life, or how could you venture into France in time of war?"

"I in France, Polly? What makes you suppose that?"

"Your greatcoat has been soaked with salt water; and your linen, I feel certain, has been washed by a French laundress."

"Why, Polly, you'd make an inquiry agent at Bow Street. I am well watched, I see."

"Dearest, you can't expect me to feel no anxiety about you. I am in continual dread of hearing of your arrest or imprisonment. You know, my love, when political missions of deep secrecy are mentioned, such dangers must occur to one."

"Wise little woman! What a head you have, Polly!" laughed Friend, taking her face between his hands. "Trust me, my life. Whatever dangers I may run, I am pretty well able to guard against them. And there's another safeguard you have, my love," he continued seriously. "I never forget that I am carrying your dear happiness with me wherever I go; and that's as precious to me as my own life. I am not likely to risk that lightly, little woman. For you do place your happiness in this rough old carcase of mine, don't you, dearest?"

"All, all," she murmured, resting her head against him. "Only not in your—not in what you choose to call your carcase, husband. In your immortal soul,—in our immortal love."

He caressed her very tenderly; yet, her face being hidden on his breast, his eyes twinkled with roguish mockery and he pulled an instantaneous grimace over

her head. She was aware only of the pressure of his encircling arms, of his kisses on her forehead, and was content. She might have seen his expression, however, without experiencing any new shock. That he could not respond to her in her higher flights she was only too well aware. But though so different in quality, their affection was strong enough to override all disparities: in fact, their very discords seemed to enrich the harmonies of the love in which they were resolved.

CHAPTER IV

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

THAT same night Friend left Brighton; and his wife after his departure dropped back at once into languor and feebleness. Susan, absorbed in romantic visions of war and heroism and love, felt no concern at this; she hardly noticed it: but it had a practical inconvenience which she felt. It left her with no other companion for her daily walks than the girl who waited on her; for Betty, resolving to supply Susan's deficiencies by making extra fuss herself, would not stir from her mistress. But this was soon remedied by Lady Anne Craven, who finding that Susan was left much to herself, begged that she might be allowed to join her party whenever she liked. Mrs. Friend was very grateful for the invitation, and gave a thankful consent; but she was not prepared for its consequences. The next step was that their new acquaintance begged to be allowed to take Susan to visit Mrs. Fitzherbert. The great lady had noticed Lady Anne's beautiful protégée, and wanted to know her. She had herself asked her to bring her young friend. Mrs. Friend was horror-stricken. "Dear Lady Anne!" she exclaimed, "I could never let Susan enter that house!"

"My dear madam, you are over-scrupulous, I protest, Mrs. Fitzherbert is accepted everywhere as the wife of His Royal Highness. In fact, an invitation from such a quarter is almost equivalent to a command."

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"I should be extremely sorry to appear rude and disobliging, but I cannot, indeed I cannot allow my Susan to visit there."

"But what is your objection, ma'am? Mrs. Fitzherbert is actually and in reality the Prince's wedded wife. I know on the best authority that they are really legally married. Her claim is acknowledged in the highest quarters; the Duke of York treats her as a sister."

"Dear Lady Anne! It cannot be a legal marriage. There is the Princess of Wales."

"But the Prince married Mrs. Fitzherbert before he went through the ceremony with the Princess of Wales. I assure you, no one in Brighton dreams of questioning Mrs. Fitzherbert's position. She would be very much hurt if she knew it was doubted; and she is a lady of the strictest virtue. And such kindness of heart! Such gracious condescending manners!"

"It is a very sad position, of course, but——"

"Her sufferings have been terrible, poor creature! She has been greatly maligned; and she has the utmost nicety of conscience. I do not see myself how greater delicacy could have been shown."

Mrs. Friend dreaded nothing so much as to join in a persecution or to fail in charity; and when Lady Anne took the line of dwelling on Mrs. Fitzherbert's sufferings, she began to waver. Moreover she attached so much more importance to a religious ceremony than to a legal one, that she asked herself whether in strictness it were not the Princess of Wales who occupied an ambiguous position. She was not very strong in argument, and easily talked over by any one who possessed a good flow of words and plenty of confidence; and after Lady Anne had dwelt on Mrs. Fitzherbert's virtues and the pain it would give her to have her request refused, she yielded and gave her consent. Of course

upon reflection she repented. She bethought herself that Susan's young reputation should be shielded from the remotest contact with scandal; she wondered what her husband would say; and worked herself up into an agony of apprehension over the dissolute acquaintances of the Prince that the child might meet beneath that roof. But it was too late. Susan, in the highest possible spirits, had flown across the Steine to Lady Anne's cottage, and the two were without doubt at that moment in the center of the circle of danger.

Susan came back radiant. Mrs. Fitzherbert's drawing-room was full of company, and she seemed to have been the attraction of the evening. There was a young Lord Combleigh there, and his friend a Mr. Evelyn Armour, whose attentions cast those of her humble servant Mr. Raby into the shade. Lord Combleigh had audibly pronounced her to be the prettiest creature seen in Brighton this twelvemonth; Mr. Armour told her she had the eyes of an angel with the bloom of a Venus. "Foolish flattery!" said Mrs. Friend.

"They were very foolish, dear aunt, but I don't think they were insincere. Because if they had been, they need not have come near me, need they? There is nothing to attract people to me, unless they really do happen to like me. It is not as if I were a young lady of rank or of great fortune."

"They may admire your face, my love, just for its novelty, without feeling the slightest esteem for your mind or for your character. You must be on your guard, my Susan, against flatterers. Their praises of you mean nothing but that their eye is caught by your outward looks, the least precious part of yourself, as you know very well, my dear; and they have no motive at all unless they mean to deceive and betray you, and by lifting you up to a false esteem of yourself, to degrade you more easily afterwards."

“Oh, I’m sure Mr. Armour would not deceive or betray me, dearest aunt. He seemed so much in earnest! Just fancy, he is a grandson of Lord Mountstephen, whose house we are staying in. He was vastly surprised when he heard where we are staying. He says he must come and pay his respects to you, aunt. I wonder he is not living here himself.”

It seemed strange to Mrs. Friend also; but she told Susan many reasons might account for it. The child would have chattered on half the night, till Mrs. Friend stopped her and sent her to bed with a further warning against trusting to the praises of young men. But it was as ineffectual as all such wisdom is fated to be. Susan, innocent as any convent nursling, could not believe in the possibility of harm in anything so sweet as the homage she was receiving. She was puzzled by the weight her aunt laid on the matter. “What does she mean by ‘betray’ and ‘degrade’?” she thought. “What harm could these gentlemen possibly do me? I might get my head full of silly notions and grow arrogant and vain; but could that be called a betrayal? It must be what aunt meant. But I believe she exaggerates. I am certain these gentlemen admired me; but they were trying to do me honor; they would like to raise me, not degrade me. They seem to think I am a sort of queen; nothing would be too good for me if they had their way. It is delightful; they are only too good and kind. I will try not to let myself be puffed up and grow vain and conceited; but I don’t see how there can be any betrayal in the case.”

There was a marked difference between the society Susan met at Mrs. Fitzherbert’s and that to which she had been introduced by Lady Anne. Notwithstanding the latter lady’s disclaimer of extending her politics into social life, most of her friends were of good old Tory connections; whereas Mrs. Fitzherbert’s house was a

meeting-place for all the wildest Whig partisans of the Prince of Wales. Partly in flattery of their leader, partly through their natural inclinations, they made it their boast to be men of wit and gallantry, furious gamblers, hard drinkers, and of loose morals; while the Tory section of society, taking its tone from the Court, professed an outward decorum; though it was well known that strict principles were by no means a passport to the favor of George the Third in political matters. Mrs. Fitzherbert, though not undeserving of the good character ascribed to her by Lady Anne Craven, had an easy temper and was far from demanding a high standard of manners from her guests; and if Mrs. Friend had been a witness of some of the scenes that took place in that drawing-room, she would have been firm enough in her refusal to let Susan enter it. Lady Anne, more accustomed to the manners of polite society, and with a true Tory veneration for the aberrations of Royalty, thought little harm of horseplay, innuendo, and broad witticism, of which, moreover, she supposed Susan too young to perceive the significance. And she was quite right. Susan understood nothing whatever; though Lady Anne, by her injudicious treatment of the girl's request for explanations, her parade of mystery, and her frequent "Young girls of your age, my dear, should know nothing of such things," revealed to her the existence of a certain line of subject of which she had previously been unconscious. But it did not greatly interest her as yet. She soon began to be aware, however, of a lack of respect in the open admiration with which the younger gentlemen treated her. Lord Combleigh and Mr. Armour had no idea of engaging a beauty's attention otherwise than by undisguised compliments; and after she had heard a dozen times or so that she was the loveliest young creature on earth, the statement began to pall upon her, and she found her

admirers grow tiresome. She compared them with Mr. Raby, and began to think of him and his ceaseless talk of Parliament with new toleration. Perhaps she was the more readily softened towards him as he was not present to weary her further. He had gone back after the Lewes review to resume his legislative duties, assuring her he would use his utmost endeavors to run down again later on. He, however, had always been deferential, had appealed to her intellect, had tried to enlist her sympathies. Mr. Armour made no such attempt. He seemed to think she had no interest in life beyond her own looks. And, moreover, he grew insolent. One day when they happened to be alone in the balcony of Mrs. Fitzherbert's drawing-room for a moment, he addressed her familiarly as his angel, and tried to pass his arm round her waist. Deeply offended, but not knowing how to express her resentment, she left the balcony and placed herself behind Lady Anne, who was playing Pam at a card-table; nor would she speak to the offender for the next few days. She began now dimly to realize the meaning of her aunt's warnings. She found that the admiration she excited was not quite the unselfish, chivalrous emotion which she had supposed. But her disillusionment did not go so far as to disgust her with society. She had conceived a romantic affection for the beautiful Mrs. Fitzherbert, and caused Mrs. Friend many pangs of terror by her rhapsodies of praise. She had formed a great friendship, too, with one of Mrs. Creevey's daughters, a girl about a year older than herself; and most of the elder ladies were very kind to her. So that though the first magical glow of delight had waned which had seemed to raise her from earth and lift her into a seventh heaven of adoration and power, enough remained to make her enjoyment very vivid and satisfactory.

Besides the promenades of the quality upon the Steine,

there were frequently diversions passing of a more active sort. The younger gentlemen amused themselves there with various sports, sometimes cricket, sometimes foot-races, and sometimes mere rough horseplay of a kind that Lady Anne did not think very suitable for Susan's sight. It naturally happened, therefore, that she was very anxious to see these pastimes that drew such crowds of spectators; and one morning when Lady Anne was engaged and the maid Jenny attended her to the bathing-machines, she told her that she wished to stop on her return and look on, if anything was going forward.

"And certainly, miss, for why should you not?" said Jenny. "They do sure have fine sport here sometimes, especially when his Royal Highness the Prince is down. La, one year he and a lot of gentlemen were on the Steine amusing themselves with shooting like, and they shot off the tops of all the chimney-pots on Mr. Windham's house; and there was rare sport once, when one gentleman mounted astride of another's shoulders, and they turned a young bullock loose, and the gentleman carrying the other on his shoulders raced the bullock all round the Steine."

"I should have liked to see that; why will Lady Anne never let me stay to watch?" said Susan. "There was quite a crowd yesterday opposite the Castle Tavern, but I could not see what it was about."

"They do say there was a bet between two gentlemen that one would carry the other twice round the Steine; and the other bet him he wouldn't; and when they comes to do it, he says he'll carry him but not his clothes, and as how he'd never bargained to carry his clothes, so he's to strip, if you please, before all the company. To be sure there'd be a great crowd gathered for a sight like that; but it didn't come to nothing after all."

"Jenny, you should not repeat such things," said Susan, growing red.

"Well, come on, miss; sure enough there's some fun going forward to-day. What a squealing, to be sure! Why, it's a pig they've got! Come on, miss, and see the sport."

"Are you sure it's nothing horrid, Jenny?" asked Susan, hanging back.

"Oh no, nothing horrid, nothing horrid at all, miss," said Jenny, eagerly pushing forward to the rails which inclosed the turf. "Do just look, miss! If this isn't rare sport! They've tied a young pigling to a post, and are making a cock-shy of him!"

Jenny described the sport with accuracy. A young pig, innocently pinky-white and in the tender flower of his age, was tied by a rope of ten or twelve feet long to a post; and a group of noble sportsmen, among whom Susan recognized Sir John Lade, Lord Combleigh, Mr. Armour, and others, were pelting it with round beach pebbles. Every hit was recorded by a piercing squeal from the victim, who rushed round and round his stake mad with terror, and entranced the spectators with delight when he entangled himself in his tether or got pulled up short by having wound it tightly round the stake. The humor of the scene failed to reach Susan's comprehension. She felt nothing but pity for the victim and disgust at the cruelty of the sport; but the press of spectators did not allow her an immediate retreat. "O Jenny, come away!" she cried; but Jenny would not lend her assistance. Just then one of the marksmen either accidentally or purposely armed himself with a sharp-edged flint instead of a smooth pebble; and the success of the shot was marked by a crimson gash on the clean white side, and the blood streamed down. The victim's shriek of pain was more than Susan could bear; but the noise and laughter had collected such a crowd

that she could not extricate herself. She could only close her eyes and turn away, when a roar of indignation made her look round for its cause. A young man had leapt from the group of sportsmen and had cut the pig's cord. It was making off at full speed towards a side-street, pursued by some of the spectators while others tried to intercept its course. But the chief attention of the crowd was given to the pig's deliverer, who stood at the post in a fine posture of defense. Cries of anger and remonstrance assailed him: one or two pebbles flew at him. "I'd do it again!" he was shouting. "If any of you gentlemen are dissatisfied, I'm ready to defend my conduct with my fists. Stop your cowardly stone-throwing; come on like Britons if you want to fight; I'm your man; I'd fight any three of you!" But no one accepted the challenge, though oaths and reproaches were hurled freely at him.

"Come, Jenny, come away!" said Susan, giving a perfunctory little pull at the maid's arm. But she was really now as reluctant to stir as Jenny; only a feeling of consistency and dignity made her offer to depart. And Jenny opposed a passive resistance. "There'll be a fight; they'll fight over it for sure!" she exclaimed, "Oh la, miss, let's stay and see it!"

The fact was that Susan was fascinated by the appearance of the pig's champion. He was a splendidly made young fellow of one-and-twenty, tall and lightly built, with long arms and powerful shoulders surmounting a slight waist and loins, so as to give him an elastic, graceful carriage, set off by the noble poise of the head. The head itself was remarkably well shaped and covered with curly yellow hair; the features were regular, and wore a frank, manly expression. She was conscious of a strange pang of admiration; and if his good looks alone would not have held her motionless, his generous intervention on behalf of the poor little pig and his

courage in defying the angry crowd, made her heart swell with such a press of feelings as chained her feet to the spot.

Lord Combleigh had sprung at him and seized him to drag him away; but a mere flicker of that wonderful arm sent him sprawling on the ground. There was a roar of laughter. The other men closed in, shouting and gesticulating; some angry words were heard, but mirth was carrying the day. "They're all going to fight!" declared Jenny, peeping under the elbow of the man in front of her. "No, they're not; they're urging 'em to make it up. They want him to fight one of 'em. He's going to fight Captain Barclay!"

"Gully! Gully! Send for Gully!" shouted voices. "Set him to fight Gully!"

"Who is that they are calling for?" asked Susan.

"Why, Gully—why, he's the great fighting man; the Prince's prize-fighter. He's down here training under Captain Barclay. This here young chap what let the pig go is North, Lord Combleigh's man, in training for the ring. He's a pretty fellow, ain't he, miss?"

"Come away, Jenny," said Susan, an unbearable disgust coming over her. "Let's go home. We don't want to see a brawl between prize-fighters."

"La, miss, it 'ud be as pretty a turn-up as ever you see," said Jenny, lingering reluctantly; but Susan was firm, and she had to follow. "Well, now I declare, miss, it's a pity to miss the sight; and such good places as we had too. He's a picture for a king, that young North; how beautiful he did look to be sure as he stood there and defied 'em all to come on! Not but what it was a saucy thing to do to spoil the gentlemen's sport in such a way like. But it shows a good heart in him, don't it, miss? Well, there then, a tender heart towards dumb animals is what I always did like myself; and there's many as thinks themselves his betters as I

wouldn't say, 'Thank you' to for all their civility; while if it was him as should come up and ask me for a kiss——"

"Be quiet, Jenny! Hold your tongue, do!" cried Susan. She had deigned to feel an interest in the young man herself; and did Jenny dare to think herself on a level with him?

"I wasn't a-saying no harm, miss," protested Jenny; but Susan cut her short with "Hold your tongue when I bid you, girl."

She was deeply mortified. A pugilist training for the ring! Was this her hero; the companion of jockeys and rat-catchers, and all that was lowest and most brutal? And yet under all this disgust, the recollection of his noble appearance thrilled through her. "He may have a soul above his trade; he may perhaps be a victim of ill-fortune—some scion of a noble house stolen from his home in infancy," she thought, drawing freely on her stock of romances. "Surely so gallant an exterior can never conceal a base or vulgar soul?"

She would not suffer Jenny to mention the affair again; but she bent her ear eagerly to catch any morsel of gossip about the morning's occurrences that might transpire; but it was not till the next day that she heard from old Martha Gunn, the bathing-woman, on whose garrulity she could rely, that "there had been a bit of a mill on the Steine between Gully the Prince's man and that young fellow of Lord Combleigh's, North; and Gully had knocked the young chap into a cocked hat." Her heart owned a pang of disappointment, and she allowed herself to grieve over the humiliation and probable disfigurement of her hero: what dreadful injury, life-long no doubt, was implied by that ominous phrase? Her apprehensions on this score, however, were speedily relived; for on her second turn round the Steine that afternoon with Mrs. Friend and Lady Anne, she perceived

the object of her solicitude walking with Lord Combleigh, and looking quite unaltered except for a strip of plaster across the jaw. Their course led them close to the ladies. Lord Combleigh took off his hat and bowed, and Susan glancing eagerly at his companion, received his glance full in her face. Her eyes dropped; she blushed from brow to chin. She did not see that he exhibited a similar mark of confusion, for so greatly was she overcome that she shrank behind Lady Anne and did not venture to look up till they had turned the corner of the Steine. To think that he had noticed her threw her into an unaccountable state of agitation. Fortunately her companions, engrossed in their own conversation, had perceived neither the incident nor the confusion it caused her.

CHAPTER V

A CHAPTER OF LOW LIFE

“NORTH! Young North! You’re to go to Dr. Vincent in his study.”

It was an ominous summons; and all the boys within hearing testified by grimaces and jeers their anticipations of trouble. Young North, a tall handsome lad of seventeen, prepared to obey with puzzled misgiving. He could not think what crime could have come to light, being as far as he knew tolerably innocent of mischief at the moment. With a sinking heart he entered the study and stood before the great and dreaded head of Westminster School.

“Ah, young North,” said Dr. Vincent, glancing up at him from under his shaggy brows, and then burying himself again among the papers in front of him. He remained silent for a considerable and very trying space, reading a single letter, it appeared, over and over again. North waited in nervous expectation.

“William North,” said Dr. Vincent at length, raising his head and gazing at the boy through his spectacles and speaking with a slow, measured utterance, “I have to impart to you a trying piece of news, a very unfortunate occurrence—for you. I have this morning received information of the sudden death of your protector, Lord Budeley, through an accident in the shooting-field. I regret to say that his lawyers, who write to me with intelligence of the tragic event, inform me

that he has died without a will, and that no provision has been made for you."

"I wanted no provision from him," said the boy defiantly.

"You are, however, as I understand, entirely destitute of other assistance; and some expression of regret, North, on the death of your only friend and most generous protector, would better beseem you than a vain show of independence. I take it you are now thrown upon the world upon your own resources. You perceive that your connection with Westminster College is at an end."

"Very well, sir. I may take my books and clothes, I suppose? Shall I go at once?"

Dr. Vincent hesitated a moment. To turn the boy out into the streets was not agreeable to him; but he saw nothing else to be done. "Yes," he assented gravely; "you may remove your belongings and go at once. You will, I suppose, apply to the representatives of your late protector: it is highly probable that their respect for Lord Budeley's memory or their sense of charity will induce them to afford you some assistance. Here is the name and address of the firm of lawyers who manage the affairs of the lamented deceased. I should advise you in the first place to apply to them. And now, North, notwithstanding your somewhat unfeeling reception of these calamitous tidings, you have my good wishes for your future. Your conduct here has been in the main highly creditable to your late lamented noble patron: you leave us with a good education and a high character: and I trust you will find these invaluable possessions a safe provision for your future."

He waved the boy away with a comfortable sense of having spoken generously. William North, his heart too full for speech, betook himself to his dormitory till he

should be sufficiently recovered to collect his belongings and depart. He felt no regret at all for the death of Lord Budeley, whose supposed relationship to him was a source of unbearable shame and resentment. Many were the fights he had fought on account of allusions to his birth; and being remarkably strong for his age he had succeeded at last in silencing his schoolfellows' tongues. Easy-tempered and forbearing in general, on this subject the slightest hint roused him to frenzy; and boys pointed him out with awe and admiration to each other, and told how young Haslett had spent six weeks in bed with a collar-bone and three ribs broken, on account of a taunt on this subject. He was glad to be rid of a parentage with a stain upon it, even if it left him beggared on the London streets; and he took up his bundle of clothes and books and went forth from the gates of Westminster School determined at all events against attempting to extort the charity of Lord Budeley's heirs. If he ever could have entertained an idea of applying to them, Dr. Vincent's manner of recommending the course had made it impossible; and he resolved to trust solely to his own strength and to Heaven for his future subsistence.

He took his way eastward along the Strand, past Temple Bar into the City. He had five shillings in his pocket, and a change of clothes in his bundle, as well as a few books. He turned into Paternoster Row, and looked about for a bookshop where he could sell his library. After trying in vain at a publisher's, he found one; and for the sum of two-and-sixpence parted with a Latin *Delectus*, Xenophon's *Anabasis*, a dictionary, a calf-bound copy of the *Ars Poetica*, which he had received as a prize (Lord Budeley had been present at the prize-giving that year; poor William never earned a prize by his own talents), *Robinson Crusoe*, and the *Voyages of Captain Cook*. Then, his burden greatly

lightened, though far from being equally relieved in mind, he began his search for employment.

He met with no success; and as, hungry and disheartened, he was making up his mind to enter a cook-shop and fortify himself against future starvation with a good dinner, an ill-looking fellow ran violently into him, and sneeringly begging his pardon, picked his pocket of his money, snatched his bundle from his hand, and was off before he had recovered from the shock. It was his first experience of the manners and customs of street life, but by no means his last. Hungry and worn out, he lay down to sleep in the shadow of a dark archway opening on a little court. While he slept two ruffians and a woman set upon him, beat him till he was unconscious, and stripped him of all his clothes to his shirt. In the morning, while shivering and with senses but half returned, he was experimenting to see how far his sole remaining garment could be made to do duty for the absent ones, he was found by the watchmen; who, after much altercation and laying all the blame of his unclad condition on him, were about to haul him off to the guard-house; when a woman leaning out of one of the windows in the court, attracted by the spectacle of a crowd, had the charity to fling him an ancient pair of breeches; which he accepted at the moment with the utmost gratitude, though he afterwards found a thousand reasons for regretting he had ever put them on. And so began Will North's *Æneid*, a bitter and a hard experience.

For some weeks William picked up a living as a stray dog might. Sometimes a gentleman threw him a copper for holding his horse; sometimes a woman gave him a hunch of bread and cheese or a bowl of milk; sometimes a beggar shared with him his crusts and half-gnawed bones. Once he actually fainted in the street from sheer starvation, and a woman of the town took pity

on him and fed him with bread sopped in wine until life returned to him. She gave him to understand that he need look no further for a living, for she was willing and able to keep him in idleness "like a gentleman" on her earnings; but North, instead of feeling gratitude, was revolted. He often wondered how he lived through this period. Many a day dawned on him with such sick sensations of exhaustion that he made sure he should be dead before it closed; and he discovered that the great difficulty of physical existence is not, as he had imagined, to live, but to die. He could not die; he wished he could. He thought sometimes of following Dr. Vincent's advice and seeking help from his father's representatives, but he always postponed the revolting step; and when he reflected that, having torn up and flung away the paper with the lawyers' address, he had no means of applying to them save by returning to his old school and exposing his destitution to his school-master, he rejected the idea with disdain.

He found his most profitable jobs at the doors of taverns and at the gates of the great inn yards, where gentlemen often would throw him a copper for holding their horses, or where the ostlers, leading out the plunging, spirited coach-team, were glad of an extra hand when the horses were fresh, or when the up-coach came in late, and all the passengers shouted for attendance at the same time. North discovered in himself a great affection for horses, those strong, splendid creatures who never repaid one's best endeavors with oaths and execrations, whose ill-temper one could account for and pacify, whose affection was faithful and disinterested. There was a stable-yard in Cheapside, at the Dolphin Inn, which he used to haunt in particular: the Portsmouth coach started thence, for one of whose horses he conceived a deep affection, a bay mare whose dark sympathetic eyes seemed to read all his troubles, and whose

obvious preference for his hand at her harness-buckles cheered his lonely heart. Seeing him handy with the horses the ostlers often made use of him: the head of the stables at length noticed him, asked him if he wanted a job, and took him on as stable-boy.

Then followed the second period of his independence. He had now food, clothes, and a bed in a hay-loft assured him, and he liked his work among the horses: what he did not like was the constant stream of foul language and abuse that flowed over his head, the blows, kicks, and thrashings he received, and the atmosphere of drink, brutality, and bestiality natural to most of his companions. He remained acutely conscious that he was a gentleman by blood if not by birth, on both sides of his parentage; but if he betrayed by the slightest sign that he thought himself above his surroundings, he increased their evil a hundredfold; and he was fain to hold his tongue and dissemble. But a way of escape was beginning to open to him. He had been above the average for his age in strength and activity at school, and his fine development attracted the attention of the various sporting characters who thronged the inn yard. He was put up to box and wrestle, and his success called forth admiration in plenty. He began to take lessons; there were many to instruct him; he soon found he could hold his own; and even a certain six-foot-one, sixteen stone, bullock-shouldered ruffian, who had been the chief torment of his life, began to leave him alone and to hold him in respect. But it was a squalid, miserable life. He often thought in moments of despondency that it was not worth the living; and wondered if he should not do better to cut his throat and have done with it; or at least to enlist for a soldier. He would probably have taken this latter course but for what was at once his chief consolation and his greatest danger: his good looks won him favor from

the women wherever he went; and lonely and craving for affection as he was, he could not resist their advances. It is true he sometimes felt ashamed of himself. He did not enjoy the idea of amours with a slipshod servant-girl or draggle-tailed pot-house alewife; but he was not greatly given to reviewing his conduct; and the idea, when it did occur, possessed so much less force than the reality, that it had little effect in influencing his conduct. And when the wenches pressed round him so confidingly, and were so kind and affectionate and inviting to a fellow—why, it was not in this fellow to repulse them.

So time passed, and his strength and skill increased, and his fame as a boxer spread till noted "Corinthian" bloods would come to see him spar, and get up matches between him and other rising young ornaments of the ring; and his good looks increased too, until they attracted the attention of the landlady of the Dolphin herself, a very grand personage with silk dresses and real gold ear-rings in her ears. Will hung back as much as he could: he was afraid of this game, and did not see any charm in the lady to make him willing to enter for it; but her encouragements by-and-by became unmistakable. She pressed him to come any time into her private bar—any time he liked; he should always find a welcome and a glass of cherry-brandy, always; possibly further favors were hinted at. At last, passing the door of the sanctum, he was seized and dragged in by force. The cherry-brandy was certainly excellent; the lady was everything that was amiable; he began to think himself a fool to hang back. What wonder that he took her at her word and came next time uninvited? Alas, there was already an occupant of the snug arm-chair by the fire. A portly gentleman with an inflamed nose and military bearing sat opposite the fair widow and was sipping her cherry-brandy. And then instead

of welcoming him, mine hostess fell upon him with such vindictive spite and venom as made his hair fairly bristle at the roots; a low, filthy, sneaking vagabond he was called, a rascal, a thief, a plundering villain, a dirty stable cut-throat; she would raise the house on him; she would have him whipped out of the yard with a kettle at his tail like a mad dog. Like a dog with a kettle at his tail indeed Will slunk off, wondering in what lay his offense. That it was indeed a serious one was proved by the lady's being as good as her word in turning him away. As soon as it was morning he was ordered to be off, bag and baggage. But by now he had no lack, if not of friends, yet at least of sympathizers interested in his movements and ready with their advice and suggestions. Old Johnny Stamp, the ex-coachman and bruiser, who had trained him in boxing, gave him a bed and board; told him it was a thousand pities so fine a young chap should not devote himself entirely to the ring, promised to find him a patron who would look after his future, and vowed that his fortune was made—an actual golden, chinking, ponderous fortune in hard round guineas, if he would only be guided by him and allow himself to be properly trained and coached.

At this juncture, enter Lord Combleigh, a young Corinthian of the first water and a zealous patron of sport. He looked on with lively interest at a sparring-match between Will and one of his footmen, Black Jacob, who had no small reputation as a bruiser. Will had the better of it: Lord Combleigh felt his muscles in an ecstasy, measured his chest, shoulders, and arms, took his weight, and offered on the spot to engage him permanently at forty pounds a year and his keep, and whatever he should make for himself by a successful fight, on condition he went into training at once for a match under regular P.R. rules with the Clapton Pet. The

offer was too good to be refused. The path was not what he would have chosen, but any means of raising himself to fortune and out of the crowd of bullies, blackguards, and drunkards in which he had been stewing was welcome; so he entered Lord Combleigh's service as a professional bruiser.

And this began the third chapter of William North's experiences. At first he felt fairly satisfied with his new situation. He had bettered his position socially and with regard to money; and he had escaped from some of the worst and most disgusting of his old surroundings. But whether on the whole he had reason to congratulate himself he soon began to doubt; and he doubted increasingly as time went on, until a day came when he heartily wished himself back among the horses in the stable-yard of the Dolphin Inn. He had never found a friend to equal the dear old bay mare. On the whole, he concluded the average tone of his new associates to be even lower than that of his old ones. It was true he did not see anything so bad as the worst of his old life, but then neither did he see anything so good as its best. Into the inn-yard came many a well-bred, clean-living gentleman whose very look strengthened and refreshed him: he saw pleasant family parties starting off by coach; merry schoolboys on their way to or returning from school, with loving, anxious mothers, refined and ladylike and good, to see them off or to welcome them home with warm embraces. Crusty, warm-hearted old humorists, too, with sharp words and wry faces and kind deeds even for horses and under-ostlers, he met; into the coaching yard came all sorts and conditions of men, a ceaseless ebb and flow of all that was rich and interesting and strange and admirable and detestable and vile in the human race. Now, his sole intercourse was with the one type, the unintellectual, material-minded, and often brutal sport-

ing man. And he was no longer in the way of receiving consolation from feminine intercourse. While in training for a fight he was kept rigorously from the most distant sight of a petticoat, and when his liberty was allowed him he did not know where to turn. His old acquaintances were out of reach and far away; and after one or two attempts his pride revolted from going in search of—of what? A venal love was not what he wanted. He sickened at the thought of becoming a corrupter of innocence, a seducer as his father had been. He wanted the women to make the advances, as in fact they had always done before; but now in his exclusively male surroundings they had little chance of finding him out. In truth, it was not love at all he wanted, only sympathy and tenderness, and to be listened to when he talked about himself; but he knew of only one sort of friendship between man and woman. And then his prospects of freeing himself from his servitude seemed remote and unattainable. He was as yet only twenty, and no match for the full-grown men of his profession; he had hardly done growing in height, and had not nearly attained his full breadth and weight. He had been successful in several sparring-matches; his great agility and lightness of build stood him in good stead so far; but it would be long before he could challenge and conquer one of the heroes of the ring, and begin to lay in that fortune of golden guineas which was to set him free. There was not much money to be made by sparring-matches; gentlemen did not care to stake high on such child's play. As for his forty pounds a year, it did not go far considering that he was expected to dress like a gentleman and had at times to make a splendid appearance when Lord Combleigh wanted him to show off before some great personage, perhaps the Prince of Wales; and also it was impossible to live in a sporting fraternity without betting freely;

and though he occasionally won by these means, he, like other people, found that on the whole he lost more than he gained. He had learnt to loathe the prize-ring and all its works with deadly loathing before he had been with Lord Combleigh two years. He dimly felt, though he did not concern himself much with the workings of his mind, that his character was deteriorating in this slavery. Certainly his body might as well have worn chains as be at the beck and call of any one who wanted him to fight. And then Lord Combleigh took him down to Brighton, where the Prince of Wales had a young fellow named Gully whom he backed against North; and there, while walking on the Steine with his patron, Will saw a sight that took his breath away and made his blood run fire and ice at the same time—the loveliest young girl surely that ever walked the earth, with all the beauty and all the virtues of the whole angelic host evident in her countenance—and when she actually raised her eyes and he received her lovely, modest glance, overbrimming with kindness and sweetness, full in his own, the blood rushed to his face and his whole soul fell down in tumultuous rapture of surrender at her feet. In short, at the first glance Will North had of Susan Marny, he fell head over ears in love with her. And if he had hated the prize-ring and pugilism before, his destestation was now increased tenfold. He had nothing but vile associations and sordid prospects to offer her, and longed to lay before her all that was worthiest, noblest, loveliest in the world: nay, the very world itself was exalted by her existence, and consecrated by her presence, life assumed higher and diviner meanings. He haunted the Steine where she walked, and lay in wait to catch a glance from her beautiful eyes. He found out where she lived, and all his thoughts were concentrated on that spot. He discovered that she sometimes walked in the garden in the

evening, and night after night he posted himself just outside the hedge, to undergo pangs of rapture when he saw her, and if she did not come, agonies of longing and despair which were hardly less sweet than the joy of seeing her. He could not tear himself away; and when he was able to slip from Evans, his trainer, and Black Jacob and the rest of Lord Combleigh's sporting train, he would watch by the garden the whole night through, unconscious of time and weariness, his whole being glowing, thrilling, transfigured in the glory and ecstasy of his love.

CHAPTER VI

A CHAPTER OF HIGH LIFE

UNDETERRED by Susan's recent coolness, Mr. Armour and his inseparable companion Lord Combleigh came to call on Mrs. Friend. The manners of both gentlemen had undergone some improvement. Mrs. Friend, notwithstanding her gentle and retiring disposition, had a certain soft dignity about her which made itself felt; and there was no lady of higher rank present to be complimented with the exclusive tribute of their best behavior.

"How d'ye do, Mrs. Friend? Your servant, ma'am. Miss Marny, your most devoted humble servant." They bowed low. A few sentences of commonplace remark passed on the weather and topics of the day. Then said Mr. Armour with a would-be easy simper, "It seems a trifle odd to me, d'ye know, to be paying calls in what is as I may say almost my own house."

"You have resided here with your grandfather, Lord Mountstephen?" inquired Mrs. Friend.

"No," drawled Mr. Armour, "at least not since infancy. My grandfather has not been to Brighton for the last twenty years, and the house has been let or shut up. I'm sure, for my part, I'm delighted to see it inhabited as it is now."

Mrs. Friend bowed. "But it is a trifle queer," he continued, "to find my grandfather, whom I know so well, being his heir and all that, lending the house

to ladies whose connection with the family is quite unknown to me; though I am sure it does us honor."

"I have never met Lord Mountstephen myself," said Mrs. Friend. "He is a friend of my husband's. Their connection is probably political; Mr. Friend's occupations take him much into political circles."

"Political—ah," said the young man. "But you know my grandfather doesn't go in for politics. He is precluded from 'em by his position on the Bench. Has Mr. Friend been acquainted with him long?"

"I really cannot tell you, sir."

"And the lovely Miss Susan, is she known to my grandfather? I shall have a crow to pluck with my revered ancestor if he has been keeping the knowledge of such a paragon from me."

"No, Lord Mountstephen is quite unknown to both of us. I must refer you to Mr. Friend for all information about the connection; or no doubt your grandfather himself could supply it."

"Oh, ah, yes," said Mr. Armour. "And how do you like Brighton, ma'am? Monstrous pretty little place, is it not? Have you been over the Prince's new stables yet? They'll be magnificent when finished."

"No, I have not seen them. I hear they are to be on a splendid scale."

"Oh, splendid; princely indeed. You must let me take you and Miss Susan one of these days to see them. I could drive you as easily as wishing in my phaeton; and you wouldn't feel the least fatigue; 'pon my soul you wouldn't."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir; but I fear I am not equal to it."

"But you would entrust Miss Susan to my escort, surely?"

"Miss Marny does not go out unaccompanied by me or by some equally responsible female friend, sir."

"Come, you are too cruel! You are damnation cruel, indeed. Oh, I beg your pardon; shocking bad manners to swear before ladies. It's a thing I can't bear. But you will let me look forward to the pleasure later on when you are stronger? You are not leaving Brighton directly? After Mr. Friend's return, perhaps, you would go? When do you expect him?"

"His movements are very uncertain," said Mrs. Friend.

"Still, within a fortnight? Three weeks? A month?"

"I really cannot say, sir."

"I should really be uncommonly glad to meet Mr. Friend. I have a monstrous desire to make his acquaintance. I wish you would tell me when I might look forward to the pleasure, ma'am."

"It is not in my power to tell you, sir. I hear a party of you gentlemen spent the day at the camp at Hove yesterday. What did you think of the preparations for defense?"

"Admirable, ma'am, admirable. But it's all pains thrown away; old Boney will never think of venturing over in the face of the reception we've prepared him."

"Perhaps if we were not so well prepared he would be the more ready to invade us," said Mrs. Friend.

"I only wish he would; we'd soon send him back faster than he came. We'd soon teach him what an Englishman's made of. But no such luck; it's all a bugbear of Pitt's. Boney has far too much sense to invade us."

"I earnestly hope you may be right," said Mrs. Friend, "for of all horrors, that of a foreign invasion seems to me the most terrible."

"Oh yes, terrible indeed. Still, every man of spirit must want to have a fling at old Boney."

"But think of the bloodshed, the devastated homes, the ruined lives!"

"Oh, ah, yes indeed," said Mr. Armour. "But that's a female's point of view, ma'am. What we men look at is the glory."

"I trust you will be able to be sensible of the glory if it should ever be your fate to find yourself, young as you are, crippled for life by one of the accidents of war, Mr. Armour. A man who has lost a limb, or has been rendered a helpless invalid, has need of a very exalted notion both of glory and of duty to enable him still to sustain a manly part."

"Oh, ah, yes," said Mr. Armour uncomfortably. The image conjured up effectually silenced him. He sat a few minutes longer and then carried his friend away, who in the meantime had been staring at Susan.

Outside the house his spirits rose again.

"It's a queer go, Charley," he said. "I can't for the life of me make out who they are. Wonder if my grandfather ever heard of 'em?"

"Wonder if this Friend has any real existence?" said Lord Combleigh.

"Why, as for that, he was going about with 'em a week ago. He was with them and Lady Anne Craven at the Lewes review. Burly-looking fellow he seemed."

"Looked like a gentleman?" inquired his friend.

"H'm, well, can't be sure of that. Might be one, you know. He was well dressed, but had no style about him."

"Oh, they're of no account, I dare swear," said Lord Combleigh. "Anyhow, the girl is left pretty much to herself. Lady Anne is no protection, and that sickly little woman in there goes for nothing. She's yours, my boy."

"It's only too easy a game to be gratifying to a

fellow's vanity," said Mr. Armour. "I can't see a difficulty in the way."

"Perhaps Lady Anne will kick up a row to oblige you; or Mrs. Fritz.," suggested Lord Combleigh.

"Let the old cat squall as much as she likes. As for Mrs. Fitz., what is it to her? The girl is nothing to her, nor to Lady Anne either. She has no one in the world to protect her."

"I say, if it should turn out that they have some claim on your grandfather, you may make it devilish hot for yourself," said Lord Combleigh.

"Curse me if I care. I've run up a sufficiently long score with the old boy for a trifle more or less to make no difference. He doesn't know I'm down here now. He can't abide the Carlton House crew; he thinks I'm on the high-road to destruction, by Gad!"

"So you are, my boy, d—n my soul if you're not. You're going to the devil as fast as wine, women, and play will take you." And the prospect seemed to afford the friends unmitigated amusement, judging from the laughter with which they greeted it.

The experienced novel-reader must not, however, take the intentions of these young gentlemen too seriously. Their designs upon Susan were rather a tribute to their characters as high-spirited, dashing young men of fashion, "genuine slap-up Corinthians," than the result of deep-seated passion or steady determination. They possessed neither the character nor the will to make them really dangerous foes.

Susan meanwhile was passing her days in the occupation, undignified it must be confessed for a heroine, of surreptitious peeping after the object of her interest, the young prize-fighter North. He was often on the Steine with Lord Combleigh, Sir John Lade, or other sportsmen; and it was astonishing how frequently their glances happened to come into collision, which when-

ever it occurred, had to her the violence of a shock. It was not without severe prickings of conscience, prompted by modesty or pride or discretion, that she indulged herself in her quest. But her romancing tendency carried the day; and though an undercurrent of chill common-sense bade her recognize the distance that lay between her fancies and the probable facts, she still loved to depict him as a prince of the blood-royal of some distant country, or as an exiled champion of his country's wrongs; and as such showered upon him every virtue and attraction that imagination could suggest. But she never drew him as her suitor. Notwithstanding his obvious betrayal of the impression she had made on him, she did not venture to portray him either as enthralled by a deep passion for herself, or as raising her to a pinnacle in the eyes of the world by glorious proofs of his devotion. This was certainly to her credit, for of all the images that filled her fancy, her favorite was the romantically decorated and idealized one of herself. To enact in imagination the part of a heroine, to see herself in an arresting attitude in the middle of a thrilling situation, was the dearest delight of her heart; and that she resisted the opportunity given her by the introduction to her dreams of so striking a figure as her ideal hero, showed a respect for his individuality which, considering that her age was that which has earned the epithet of "silly sixteen," showed considerable delicacy; as well as what was perhaps a half-conscious perception that the feeling he inspired was not one to be trifled with.

But notwithstanding her avoidance of the topic of love, his image filled most of her waking thoughts. She found out that he watched for her in the garden at dusk; and night after night she would saunter down to the ragged privet hedge with the easiest carelessness in the world, and while taking observations of the moon

or the clouds or the bats, or any other equally absorbing object, would cast keen rapid glances in search of a tall form withdrawn into the shadow of a wall or escaping attention in a corner of the hedge. Her bedroom window overlooked the same end of the garden and a bit of unenclosed land adjoining the Steine; and when the moon gave sufficient light she would peep out after her candle was extinguished, and try to discover if he still kept his watch.

Mrs. Friend had no suspicion of what was going on. She shrank from society, and made her health the excuse for indulging her inclinations. She preferred to sit alone on the beach or in the garden while Susan was going about with her friends, the Misses Ord, or Lady Anne Craven. There was a deep and sincere love between Mrs. Friend and her adopted daughter, but no great confidence. Susan was a little repressed and chilled by her aunt's religious fervor. It was an air she could not breathe; and the comfort of their religion was spoilt for her by the sense of strain imposed by her aunt's high standard. Mrs. Friend never insisted on it in words or reproached Susan for her shortcomings, but nevertheless the girl shrank from confiding in her, and would sooner have died than confessed her favorite follies to her. Perhaps it would have been the same in any case. An awful distance was usually observed in those days between parents and children; confidence between old and young seems to be a modern growth.

Nor did Lady Anne Craven perceive anything, who had greater opportunities of observing the state of affairs. That good lady had no attention to spare for vulgar objects like prize-fighters. Her eyes were engrossed by the people of quality they saw on the Steine, whom she pointed out to Susan with full information on their family connections. "There goes Lady Maria

Seymour," she would say, "ill-dressed as usual. She would be a handsome woman if she knew how to dress herself. Her sister, Lady Jane Daulby, was considered a great beauty five or six years ago, but she has quite gone off since her marriage. She married Sir Harry Daulby, you know, who was the hero of that scandal I told you about the other day." Or, "That is the Countess of Portarlington with her two remaining daughters. She had six daughters, all plain, but she has married them all into the peerage except these two. They say she is trying to catch the young Duke of Stafford for Catherine, the younger of the two; and they do hint that she thinks of my cousin Tom Raby for the other. But he will not come into his title till his uncle dies, and he is likely to live many years yet; so I don't know if my Lady Portarlington would think him good enough for her Eliza, though his fortune and prospects ought to make him a welcome suitor in any circle below Royalty."

This was perhaps said as a warning to Susan; but she was quite unconscious of its application. The thought of Mr. Raby as her suitor had not entered her head. She was a little pained by Lady Anne's constant harping on genealogies and families, knowing nothing as she did of her own. She felt herself in modern phrase a parvenu, and of no account in these circles where every one had well-known connections. But when she owned as much to Lady Anne, she did her best to console her. "Never mind, my dear; family is not everything. You have fortune; and with that and your pretty face and manners you are sure to do well."

"I have fortune?" echoed Susan in astonishment.

"Oh yes; your guardian—uncle, do you call him?—told me he could give you a pretty little fortune if you married to his liking. Did you not know it? It is as

well I told you, then; for it will give you a proper sense of your consequence. You must not throw yourself away, my dear. You ought to make a really good match; for it is only among the nobility, and among them nowadays only in families like the Howards and Cavendishes and Rabys, that birth is the indispensable passport to admission."

CHAPTER VII

AN AWAKENING

MRS. FITZHERBERT had taken a great fancy to Susan. She asked her to tea and to spend the evening; and what with her invitations and Susan's friendship with the Misses Ord, the girl spent much of her time in Mrs. Fitzherbert's house, notwithstanding Mrs. Friend's efforts to check the intimacy. She was a little consoled, however, by finding that Mrs. Creevey made no scruple of allowing her daughters to be there continually; and Mrs. Creevey was a lady of undoubted propriety. One great attraction to Susan was Mrs. Fitzherbert's library, of which she had made her free. Susan was a great reader; and Mrs. Friend, though a book-lover herself and highly educated for her day, had a very rigid idea of what was proper for a young girl to read. Mrs. Fitzherbert was far more indulgent; and in her library Susan reveled in novels, romances, plays and poems such as had never before come in her way. Often while Mrs. Friend imagined Susan walking on the Downs with the Misses Ord or taking tea with them at their lodgings, she was sitting in a corner of Mrs. Fitzherbert's library, buried deep in the pages of a book.

Mrs. Fitzherbert, however, preferred the outward world. She took Susan excursions to points of interest in the neighborhood; to the race-course; to take tea at Preston and Rottingdean; to see the strange cleft in the grey Sussex downs called the Devil's Dyke, and the

wonderful panorama of landscape spread out below the hill that overhangs it. One day a visit to the camp at Hove was proposed, and Mrs. Friend was prevailed on to join the party. It was larger than she had expected; and she was sorry indeed that she had not kept to her first refusal when she found that Mr. Fox was to be of the company, whose name she dreaded even more on account of his reputation for loose life and morals than for his politics. She had never met him; and his appearance did not reconcile her to his presence. He was a huge, corpulent man, with a gross, sensual face of a Jewish cast; slovenly and negligent in his attire. She thought him at her first glance odious and repulsive, and was surprised that the devil should not trouble to make his agents more attractive. But the chances of the day threw her into conversation with him; and she soon forgot his appearance in the simple friendliness and unaffected candor with which he talked. A great warm heart, earnest and sincere, was apparent in every word. She had never met a man so easy to talk to, so devoid of all stiffness, so readily interested and amused. Before the end of the day she had ceased to consider him the agent of Satan; and if she recalled his reputed excesses it was only to sigh over the power of the world and its fashions to soil the noblest natures.

They saw the camp and the fortifications; they heard how all the coast from Harwich to Pevensey was studded with garrisons and Martello towers; how a ceaseless watch was kept for the first sight of the French sails; how on the other side of that blue, dancing water the hostile forces were assembled at Boulogne, and the very boats for transporting them lay ready; how in the great game of chess the fleets of France and England were playing with the whole world for chess-board, a single false move might bring down the enemy in one night upon them. Some of the company narrated their plan

for securing safety when the invasion took place. One would flee to Worcester, where the Queen and the crown jewels were to be sent; one would brave it out in London; another thought nothing safe nearer than Wales or Scotland. But the majority were skeptical of Napoleon's descent on England. Partly in opposition to the Tories, on whom being in office devolved the task of defending the country, and partly influenced by Fox's strong love of France which made it difficult for him to dwell on the thought of danger from such a quarter, they scoffed at the idea of an invasion, talked of it as a Tory scare, and were inclined to laugh at the strenuous preparations of the camp. Mrs. Friend thought of Raby's absorption in his Volunteers, and fancied that sober-minded young man more likely to be right than this frivolous crew. But on their return Mr. Fox began to talk about the French nation. He described them and their national characteristics with such sympathy, liveliness, and force, that she found a new idea of them growing up in her mind. They were no longer to her a monstrous, threatening shadow devoid of all human features, but became a nation of living people like herself, with only sufficient difference from the English to make them an agreeable variety and an interesting study. Her feeling as to the invasion imperceptibly changed. It was no longer a machination of the devil they had to resist, a contest with the powers of darkness; but a most lamentable difference between two great nations, whose best profit had been in friendship and sympathetic study of each other, and whose warfare could only mean a loss to civilization and progress, as well as the huge waste of life, labor, and wealth involved on both sides.

After dining with the officers they started homewards, arriving at Brighton about six o'clock. Mrs. Fitzherbert at the last moment had declined to join the party, and

every one behind the scenes understood that her sudden indisposition signified her repugnance to finding herself in company with Fox. She had, however, invited some of the party to pass the evening with her on their return; and though Mrs. Friend felt herself unequal to it, she gave a ready consent to Susan's joining Mrs. Creevey and her daughters there. After tea was over the elder ladies sat down with the gentlemen to cards, and the girls found themselves alone in the library, where Susan soon buried herself in one of Mrs. Radcliffe's romances. Her companions rallied her unsociableness, but the spell was too strong to be broken; and presently they proposed a stroll in the garden, and went out, leaving Susan alone. Perfectly happy in her solitude, no idea of being molested occurred to her. She read on undisturbed for half an hour, when the door opened and Lord Combleigh entered, accompanied as usual by his friend Mr. Armour. Susan was annoyed. She had grown to detest them both, and always tried to keep out of their way. She laid aside her book and rose to leave the room.

"What good fortune!" laughed Lord Combleigh on seeing her. "Here's the lovely Susan all alone, Armour! Where are your guardian nymphs, sweet angel?"

"I will rejoin them, if you please, my lord," said Susan, but Mr. Armour stood in front of the door. "Will you please to let me pass, sir?"

"Let you pass? Let go such an opportunity as this? I should be mad, by Gad I should, my lovely one, to let you pass without paying for all your cruelty. Let me lead you to the sofa, so; no seat yourself, my angel; what do you fear from the most devoted of your slaves?"

"Let me go, sir!" cried Susan, beginning to lose her temper.

"Not till you have accounted for all your coldness and cruelty, you little tyrant. You have held me at arm's

length all this week. How can you treat with such severity a heart that's all your own? You must pay for it, sweet Susan; by Gad you must."

"Let me go; how dare you hold me?" cried Susan, struggling to tear herself away; but her efforts only provoked the derisive laughter of her tormentors.

"What, you struggle; you'd fight, would you, my lovely Susan? You'd use your claws? Nay then, we must restrain you a little while the penalty is exacted. Hold her hands, Combleigh; how the minx fights!"

Susan was struggling with all her force; but the two odious men held her down, Armour clasp ing her round the waist, while Lord Combleigh held her arms.

"Now then, Armour, now's your chance!" he cried. "Kiss her! kiss her while she's at your mercy;—by G——, how the jade fights!" And leaning over her with all his weight, or her frantic struggles might have freed her yet, Armour covered her face with kisses, and then with horrid laughter forced up her head to bury his hot face in her neck. "Come, come, Armour, it's my turn now," remonstrated Lord Combleigh, as he saw his friend pulling at her neckerchief. Susan fought with the strength of despair,—when the door opened and Mrs. Fitzherbert appeared.

"Gentlemen!" she exclaimed, with unintentional irony. The two men let Susan go, and stood looking abjectly foolish.

"Beneath my roof, gentlemen! Is this how you treat a protégée of my own—you dare to insult me like this? There is the door, sirs; go; and never venture to pass the threshold again of the house whose hospitality you have outraged!"

They did not venture on a word. Like beaten curs with tails between their legs they slunk out. As soon as they were gone Susan burst into tears. Mrs. Fitzherbert took her in her arms.

"My poor, poor child!" she cried. "Forgive me that I have exposed you to this. I did not know you were alone. I thought till this moment you were in the garden with the Misses Ord."

"They went to the garden, and I stayed here reading," sobbed Susan. "Was it wrong of me?"

"Wrong? No, my poor innocent; but I would not have suffered it if I had known. As soon as the Misses Ord came in from the garden I came in search of you. But cheer up, sweet one; there is no harm done."

"Let me go home!" entreated Susan, quite unable to control her tears.

"Yes, my dear, as soon as you have recovered yourself a little. Come upstairs with me to my chamber. Poor child, you have been terribly shaken."

Susan would not quit Mrs. Fitzherbert's arm; she was trembling from head to foot. The lady took her upstairs, and rang for her maid to bring a glass of wine. She bathed her face with her own hands, made her lie down on the sofa, and did all she could to soothe her. The wine helped Susan to restrain her sobs, but she still begged to go home; so Mrs. Fitzherbert ordered her carriage—for though the houses were only separated by the length of the Steine, she did not think the girl fit to walk even that distance—and promised she would herself accompany her and make all explanations to Mrs. Friend. She did so; she was as kind as possible on the way; and poor Susan was dismissed to go to bed under Betty's motherly care while the explanations were made. The interview was rather a long one; so many excuses, apologies, explanations and praises of Susan had to be made. Mrs. Friend thanked Mrs. Fitzherbert very warmly for her kindness to her niece, but intimated gently that she had better cease to visit at her house; and Mrs. Fitzherbert, though she deprecated the necessity and assured Mrs. Friend there was not the slightest danger of a

repetition of the offense, was obliged to submit to the decision.

Susan passed a sleepless night. She came home shaken and trembling; thrilling with impotent fury against her insulters. But after sympathy and kindness and rest had a little restored her, when the stillness and safety of her bed had begun to calm her nerves, another aspect of the matter struck envenomed fangs into her and kept her writhing and tormented through the night. There was something about the attack which was entirely strange to her. It showed a new side to the admiration and praises of men, a side obscure and revolting which she shrank from understanding, yet which she could not escape. All sorts of fragmentary bits of information, Lady Anne's hints and mysteries, things she had seen or read, came crowding to mind with fresh significance, and fell into order under this lurid light. She had got a key which unlocked a side of life that had been closed to her. She longed, she tried to refuse to open it, but the door swung open before her. Shuddering she perceived the extent of the new domain, and how far it transformed the hitherto familiar aspect of her world. She longed to close her eyes, to creep back into ignorance; but something told her that the thing was inevitable; that it was impossible for her to become a child again.

And then a new thought struck her; a recollection of her dream hero, of the silent watcher at the garden hedge, the owner of the glance that kindled fire in her heart. Many times already had she hidden her burning face in the pillow, and shrunk under the sheets even from the unseeing darkness; at this thought she wound the sheets tightly over her head, and lay gasping and trembling, frightened at the strength of the emotion that seized her, terrified by the audacities of her mind. But though she trembled and lay in terror of herself, the horror of the new prospect was strangely modified. A

vision of manly nobility and chivalry appeared to her, in the strength of which all that was revolting became beautiful, all that was terrible, helpful and sweet. Where perfect trust and love existed, Susan saw that even these strange, apparently degrading passions of men and women became exalted and holy, a help and a strength rather than an offense.

Calmed and awed by these reflections, she inquired of herself if she were willing to acknowledge she had already placed her whole future in the power of a stranger, and a stranger of whom she knew nothing. She realized the slight hold her fancies had on the actual fact. She admitted that young North the prizefighter (that he was in the service of Lord Combleigh was surely almost enough to condemn him?) might probably be a very different person to the exiled scion of a noble house her imagination loved to paint. Never, she resolved, would she give her love to anyone unworthy; to anyone who in chivalry, constancy and tenderness did not equal her ideal. She would be very circumspect, very discreet. "But," she conceded to herself, "supposing him to be as superior in virtues as he is in appearance to all around him; supposing him to be really all I have dreamt him—then, prizefighter though he may be, I ask no more; here and now, low-born and penniless as he is, I am his, and his only."

The day was breaking, and the gray light of dawn filled the room. Susan got up, went to the window and drew aside the blind. On the further side of the garden hedge, where it was lowest—there he stood, gazing up at the house. Her heart throbbed. She waited, peering from behind the blind, till she could be quite sure her eyes had made no mistake in the dim light. Then she retired from the window, and sank down at the bedside on her knees.

CHAPTER VIII

RIVAL WOOINGS

SUSAN was spending an evening at Lady Anne's. Jenny had attended her there and waited to accompany her home, and Thomas the footman arrived at eleven o'clock to guard the two females on their return. The protection seemed adequate to all emergencies; and they set out, Susan holding to Jenny's arm and Thomas walking a few steps behind, cane in hand. They passed the Pavilion in safety; but just as they reached the Castle Tavern the door opened and six or eight gentlemen, very drunk, reeled out. The light from the doorway streamed straight upon Susan and her escort. One of the party set up a loud "Whoo-op!" and they all started in pursuit with shouts and oaths and drunken laughter. Jenny screamed, shook off Susan's hand, and ran away shrieking. Her flight attracted the enemy's attention, and two of them pursued her mimicking her cries, so that wild with fright the silly girl turned back and ran towards the town instead of home. The footman seized Susan and hurried her along; but their pursuers overtook them, and he was obliged to drop her arm and turn to defend himself. "Run, miss! Run for your life!" he called out to her. "It isn't far; I'll keep them in play."

Susan ran; but there were more assailants than Thomas could engage; Armour and another man slipped past him and were just upon her. But so was a third pursuer;

and just as the foremost stretched out his arm to seize her he caught him up and with one blow sent him spinning to the ground. Susan took a rapid glance, and her heart bounded with an assurance of safety; it was her ideal hero who had come to her rescue. She could not wait to see what happened. Another man was still in chase; breathless she ran on until she reached Lord Mountstephen's gate; then throwing it to behind her she looked round from its shelter to see her champion's success. He was struggling with a tall, powerful man; and then her fears rekindled as she saw the one North had thrown, on his feet again and breaking through the garden fence after her. It was Armour. She screamed; North threw off his antagonist with a mighty effort and sprang over the gate to her assistance. He caught her assailant just as he was about to grasp her; Susan pounded at the door knocker with all her force. There was a violent tussle; she saw a sword flash; North recoiled with an oath of pain and fury, and again Armour sprang at Susan. But her defender caught him round the body and hurled him down the steps, just as the door opened, and overbalanced by his effort he fell on the top of Susan into the hall.

At this unceremonious entrance all the household came running to the spot; and Mrs. Friend's horrified gaze perceived Susan struggling for breath on a chair, and an unknown young man standing beside her, ghastly pale and smiling feebly, with the blood streaming from his shoulder. "O Aunt!" gasped Susan. "He has saved me—he has saved me—and he's hurt!"

She explained what had happened in a few incoherent sentences. Mrs. Friend warmly thanked her defender, and begged him to sit down and let his wound be looked to. He seemed bewildered and almost incapable of movement. A servant was bidden to help him into the dining parlor, but no sooner had he reached it and was placed

in a chair than he fainted away. The ladies were in the greatest agitation. A surgeon was sent for, who dressed the wound and declared that it was not serious, but advised that the sufferer should be put to bed. Mrs. Friend was eager to place the whole house at the disposal of one who had done Susan such service; so a room was prepared and the stranger taken upstairs, to become as it proved an inmate of the house for the remainder of their stay in Brighton.

It was very late before the household went to bed that night. Thomas the footman arrived before the surgeon had been fetched, bearing a broken head as his share in the night's adventures. Jenny did not appear till past one o'clock, having been chased, according to her own account, up and down every street and lane in Brighton; but she suffered nothing worse than the fright, and a reprimand for leaving her young lady in such a predicament. Thomas on the other hand received five guineas for his gallant defense, a sum for which he thought a broken head cheap.

North's wound, though not dangerous, occasioned a good deal of fever; and for a day or two he was not allowed or even able to talk. But when he began to recover Mrs. Friend sat often in his room and had a great deal of conversation with him, and began to feel a strong interest in him. She found him very amiable and modest, and of a refined disposition. His history too, which he soon confided to her, pleaded powerfully in his favor. To North it was an intense comfort to unbosom himself to a sympathetic and cultivated listener, who received all he said with understanding kindness, and who gave him wise and gentle advice and inspiring encouragement. He told her almost everything of his past, though there were some things on which he could touch only in general terms; but she knew enough of the world to read between the lines.

Nor did he confess his love for Susan. He felt it a presumption to dream of raising his eyes to her; and though, far from striving to conquer his passion, he nourished it as much as he could and sought every opportunity of increasing it, yet he believed it doomed to failure, and never ventured to hope that Susan could return it. While confined to his room there was not much danger of a betrayal; but when once the fever had left him his convalescence was rapid. The wound healed quickly and thoroughly; and the apothecary soon advised a change of scene.

At this juncture Friend returned. He said little, but looked very grim at the relation of Mr. Armour's conduct. "How in the world comes *he* to be here?" he asked.

"Susan met him at Mrs. Fitzherbert's; I fear the company there is not always choice. I wish I had never allowed her to enter those doors!"

"Oh well, my love, there's no harm done," said Friend. "I'll go and have a talk with Master Evelyn." His brow wore the look at which his wife trembled. He never said much when he was displeased, but his anger was perhaps the more formidable for its restraint; not that he was ever angry with her, save for the quickly passing irritation of an occasional moment—and yet she dreaded it. She studied his looks and tones with a scrutiny searching as a hovering sea-gull gives the waves. In her relations with her husband, where there was so much love yet so little confidence, these signs were the principal guide to her behavior.

"My dearest life, you are not thinking of calling him out?" she cried in terror.

"I call out Master Evelyn Armour? Not I, Polly; don't distress yourself, little woman. I think I can bring the young gentleman to his senses without taking such a step as that."

78 THE INFAMOUS JOHN FRIEND

"You can always do what you choose with everyone, I know," said Mrs. Friend. "But how you will bring that young man to a sense of what he has done——"

"Well, Polly, you shall see. What will you bet that he does not send Susan the most ample apology before to-morrow morning?"

"You know I would not bet, my love. If you say he will, I suppose it will be so. I don't know how you do it, but I know you always get your will of everyone."

"Well, Polly, you wait and see." He went out. Before night a servant of Mr. Armour's arrived bearing a note to Mrs. Friend. It contained an ample, almost a servile apology for his conduct to Susan. "Well, my dear, what did I tell you?" said Friend triumphantly.

He paid a visit to North; but his wife was rather disappointed that he showed no enthusiasm in his praise. "He seems a decent sort of young chap," was all he said. "How long is he to stay here, my dear?"

"That is for you to decide, my love. The poor fellow has no employment; he is utterly destitute, in fact, for of course he can never return to Lord Combleigh's service now. And indeed I should be very sorry if he did; he is worthy of better things than that."

"Oh, well, we won't turn him out till he is strong again. The apothecary said he might come downstairs tomorrow, did he not?"

So North came downstairs, and tasted the felicity of sitting in the same room as Susan and feasting his eyes on her, till Mrs. Friend observed it and began to draw conclusions.

But that very afternoon North was thrown into the background of her thoughts by the reappearance of Mr. Raby; and the warmth with which he greeted Susan showed that his intentions, if he had nourished any, had not dwindled during his absence. "I have come back,

Miss Marny, as I said I should," he said to her. "Upon my soul I don't know how I managed to stay away so long." And he retained her hand while he said it, looking at her with such an expression as would have made Lady Anne feel, had she been present, that her next interference would come too late. From Mr. Raby the words were almost as good as a proposal. Susan felt very uncomfortable. She began to suspect that Mr. Raby might be in love with her. He hardly took his eyes off her during his visit; and when he left, Mrs. Friend saw plainly that his suit must be attended to before she could consider the case of poor Will North.

Mr. Raby had in fact come back violently in love. He had hoped that absence might weaken the force of an attraction to which he was not altogether willing to succumb; but instead he found that the image of Susan interfered with his work, his interests, and everything he did; that he could get no peace for thinking of her, and finally that his whole happiness depended on obtaining her for his wife. With this purpose he returned to Brighton; and having seen the object of his affections and found that his uneasiness was only increased till he were sure of winning her, he lost no time in making his proposals to Friend.

He called upon him in solemn state the next morning.

"I have requested the favor of a private interview, Mr. Friend," he said, "in order to lay before you proposals very dear to my heart, and which I venture to hope may not be altogether displeasing to you. I have formed an affection, a very strong affection, for your adopted daughter, Miss Marny; and though in the position in which I stand I am not entirely a free agent in the matter of marriage, my family having claims upon me which I cannot slight, I hope—I trust it may be found that there is nothing irreconcilable between these claims and Miss Marny's position; in short, that my

duty to my family and my own happiness may be attained together."

"You allude to Miss Marny's fortune, I suppose," said Friend. "I quite understand that you would not think yourself justified in seeking a penniless bride. And for my part, I should not like my girl to enter so respectable a family as yours without a fortune worth its acceptance. I own I should be very much gratified by an alliance with you, sir; and to secure it I am prepared to make sacrifices which I should hesitate at in another case. But I am not a rich man, and I am not able to do as much for Susan as I should like. I can, however, promise you twenty thousand pounds with her, if that will make her worth your taking."

"It is a handsome sum, sir; but let me say that fortune, though I do not pretend to overlook it entirely, was far from being in my mind when I made my proposals. Your generosity exceeds my expectations. But it was not entirely to fortune that I alluded. I was thinking of the question of birth."

"Oh, of birth," said Friend dryly. "Well, Mr. Raby, Susan's family perished stock and branch in the Revolution. She is of French descent; she is of the old de Marny family. They had good blood in their veins; her maternal grandmother was a Condé. But the last de Marny took the popular side in the Revolution, joined the Girondist faction, and perished with them. There is not one of the family but Susan left alive. I received her a child of four from her dying mother. We have Anglicized the name and brought her up as our own; but her real name is Suzanne de Marny."

"Indeed. I am rejoiced to hear she is of such good family: I am relieved, indeed. You can understand that I should have hesitated had there been any reason to suppose her of absolutely base extraction; or had there been any scandal or stain on her birth; but you have

set my mind entirely at rest. I wonder you have kept the facts so private."

"I don't know that we have. I at least have made no attempt to keep them private; but Mrs. Friend doesn't like the French connection, nor the part the family took in the Revolution. She'd have the girl wholly an Englishwoman. And she's brought her up like one; you'll find she's been well trained, Mr. Raby."

"Mr. Friend, I am delighted; I am overjoyed. I can have no scruples now to make my proposals in form for the hand of your lovely ward, Miss de Marny. I am, as I suppose you are aware, the heir-presumptive of my uncle the Earl of Sandown; and he, though not long past middle age, is not likely to marry. I also possess a moderate fortune inherited from my mother. I shall have pleasure in making handsome settlements upon Miss de Marny; I do not think we shall be likely to disagree about terms."

"Our lawyers will discuss them; and as you say, I don't think we are likely to disagree. Well, Mr. Raby, it gives me the greatest pleasure to sanction your addressses. I hope with all my heart you'll be successful; for you must know it lies with yourself to get Susan's consent. I don't pretend to a father's authority to dispose of her hand."

"Your favor, sir, and influence is all that I ask. I hope that with a lady so young as Miss de Marny I need not fear her affections are already engaged; and I trust that a passion so fervent as mine will not fail in time to make some impression on her heart, sensible though I am that my manners and interests are not of the sort best adapted to win a lady's favor. But I trust my unfeigned desire to please her will produce some result."

"Not a doubt of it, sir. Let her see that you love her, and she's bound to be touched. And if my good

word can be of service, you may depend upon it. From the bottom of my heart I wish you success, Mr. Raby."

No sooner had Mr. Raby taken his leave than Friend went in triumph to his wife. "Well, my dear, he has proposed for her!" he exclaimed.

Mrs. Friend had just been sitting with her patient, and her mind was engrossed with him. "Who? Not William North?" she asked, taken by surprise.

"Young North the prizefighter? Why, no; what put such a thing into your head, Polly? Do you suspect him of a tenderness for Susan?"

Mrs. Friend faltered. "Well, I have fancied—but I have no right to speak. Only he looks at her as if he worshiped the very ground she treads on."

"Does he indeed? No, my dear; I mean Mr. Thomas Raby, the future Earl of Sandown. What d'you think of this, Polly?"

"My dear, I think far more about Mr. Raby's character and disposition than his prospects. I could indeed have wished him to be of humbler station."

"Could you, forsooth? Hang all these women, they're never contented. And aren't you satisfied with his character and disposition, Polly?"

"I think Susan might be happy with him. I believe him to be well principled and upright, and sincerely attached to her."

"Well, and isn't that enough? What more does the woman want? A coronet, and rolling in wealth, and possessing all the best Tory interest:—why, my dear, a duke could ask for no more from a son-in-law! I've played my cards well this time, little woman. Give me a kiss and wish me joy!"

"I wish you joy with all my heart, dearest; and Susan too; but it is not done yet. Susan's heart has still to be won."

"Oh, Susan's heart——! What girl can stand out

against a wooer who's in earnest? And this young Raby is really deeply in love with her, though he's a steady fellow and takes the fever temperately. He'd never have taken her if I had not given him a good account of her family. Ha, ha, ha!" He laughed with intense delight.

"My love, I trust it was a true one," said his wife anxiously.

"Oh, yes, all true; true as Gospel, Polly," said Friend, still chuckling. "Have no fear, my love; I know the value of truth; there's no danger of being found out as long as one sticks to facts; hey, Polly?—But come; will you tell Susan, or shall we let the impatient lover tell his own story?"

"I think he would have the best chance if we left him to plead his own cause. Susan is romantic; she is not the girl to like him the better for having him offered to her by her guardians."

"You are right, little woman, I have no doubt. But if you can put in a word to incline her in his favor, you will, won't you?"

"Friend—husband," said his wife anxiously. "Tell me, before I promise, if all is right. You are not planning any deceit—any treachery? You are really seeking Susan's happiness—and Mr. Raby's?"

"To be sure I am, my love; and my own profit and advancement at the same time. You don't object to that, I hope? There's no harm in a man's advancing himself through his daughter's marriage when it's one likely to secure her happiness, is there? That's all the treachery I'm planning at present, my love."

"Well, dear, then I will do what I can to forward the match," said Mrs. Friend with a sigh; and I trust it will be for the happiness of all of us."

"That's my good little woman," said Friend. "Give me a kiss, Polly. This is a great day for me. Don't

doubt but that it will be for the happiness of all of us, my dear."

Mrs. Friend kissed him, but still she doubted. She sought an opportunity of letting fall a few words of praise of Mr. Raby; not enough to excite Susan's suspicions or to set her against him in pique, but just to establish a feeling of confidence in him. She wished the girl to understand the difference between him and such men as Armour.

"We have not been entirely fortunate in our Brighton acquaintances," she said. "You have seen something of the worst of the world, Susan; a lesson I could have wished you spare at your age; but I think some of our friends may be depended on. I believe Mr. Raby, for instance, to be thoroughly honest and upright, and that no one who trusts him will repent it. This is a good deal to say for a man, Susan."

"Yes, indeed, aunt," murmured Susan.

"And he is a true gentleman; and that, as you have seen, is not always the case with those who can call themselves gentlemen by birth. But how little mere birth weighs against conduct! Put such a man as Lord Combleigh into the scale with his despised follower, William North, and how far the servant outweighs the master!"

Mrs. Friend, intent on drawing her moral, did not perceive the mischief she was doing. Susan in a small meek voice and with a most innocent air inquired, "Do you believe Mr. North is to be trusted too, aunt?"

She hesitated a moment, wondering if she had been indiscreet. But she was too truthful not to reply.

"Yes, Susan; I take him too for an honest, well intentioned young man. But his sphere of life puts him in a very different position to the men we were speaking of, Lord Combleigh and Mr. Raby."

“To be sure it does,” assented Susan meekly. But inwardly she was triumphing. She cared nothing for spheres of life. She had her aunt’s authority for thinking highly of North; she could now let her fancy play round him as she liked.

CHAPTER IX

THE RETURN TO TOWN

THE visit to Brighton was drawing to an end. Mr. Raby had to return to Parliament in a few days' time, and Friend did not want at this juncture to put any separation between him and Susan. He told his wife that they must move into a different quarter of the town, that the little house in Coram Street was by no means suitable to Susan's new prospects; and he went up to find and take one. He soon wrote to say that he had secured a very good house in Harley Street, and that all should be ready for them to return there. As soon as this was arranged he came back to escort them home.

In the meantime Mr. Raby had effected his proposal to Susan, but met with a decided though gentle negative. He was not much cast down, for confident in his business abilities though he was, he distrusted his powers of love-making, and looked for success to his perseverance rather than to his first attack. Friend on his return encouraged him. "You see, sir, Miss Marny is very young, and has never looked on you in the light of a suitor till now. Girls of that age always have their head full of fancies; no doubt she has pictured a different style of wooer to herself; but persevere; make her feel that you prize her beyond everything, and she can't fail to be moved. A real lover will always outweigh a fancied one in the long run."

His words would probably have been verified if the

ideal lover himself had not happened to be upon the scene; but as this was the case poor Mr. Raby had little chance. North was desperately bashful and conscious in her presence, and hardly dared address her; but his eyes followed her always with unutterable devotion, and she would not have been woman if she had not been aware of it. If they did not converse, yet they held a great deal of intercourse with their looks. Here Susan had the advantage; for she, trembling at her own daring, ventured to translate the language of his eyes pretty accurately, but he was entirely blind to the meaning of hers. Friend meanwhile watched them narrowly, and saw plainly enough the state of his feelings. Susan, who used her utmost art to conceal hers, was not so easy to read; and blinded by his wishes in Raby's favor, he did not perceive how she inclined. North was now downstairs and taking his meals with them, though he could not yet move his arm freely and still required help in dressing. He stood by now on intimate terms with all the household; and Friend, turning over many plans in his head, conceived an idea of serving him and his own interests at the same time. Mr. Raby had happened to mention his cousin, Admiral Middleton, who had succeeded Lord Melville as First Lord of the Admiralty, and had been raised to the peerage as Lord Barham.

"I wonder, Raby, whether you could make use of your influence with Lord Barham to get a post in the Admiralty Office for this young protégé of mine, William North, the young fellow who so courageously came to Susan's assistance the night she was attacked on the *Steine* by a gang of drunken ruffians. He is out of employment, and does not know what to turn to. He is well educated and a gentlemanlike young fellow; he was brought up at Westminster School. You would be putting me under a great obligation if you would; I feel bound to do something for him."

"Certainly, sir; I am as much interested as yourself in seeing that his gallantry does not pass unrewarded. I suppose there is no doubt he is competent to fulfil a clerk's duties? The Admiralty Office would be a suitable sphere for him?"

"Just the very place of all others. A responsible and honorable employment, with a prospect of advance; oh, yes, that's the place for him. Upon my word I shall be grateful to you if you can arrange it."

"If my influence with my cousin can effect it, you may consider it done, sir. I am grateful to you, Mr. Friend, for putting me in the way of doing the young man a service."

And in a wonderfully short time Will North received an appointment to a clerkship in the Admiralty Office. How beautifully easy these things were in the good old days of influence and patronage!

"You must come and see us, North, when we're all in town," said Friend. "We are not going to lose sight of you. We consider you quite as one of the family, you know; Mrs. Friend couldn't bear to lose you after having nursed you all this while. Drop in and see us whenever you like; you'll always find a welcome." It may be imagined with what ecstasy North heard this. He was overwhelmed with gratitude, even more for the invitation than for the appointment, great as was his sense of obligation for that substantial service.

All was now arranged for their departure. North was to journey with them to take up his new duties in London. Mr. Raby had gone up a few days previously. Before his departure he had confided his matrimonial intentions to his cousin, whose disapproval was somewhat modified by hearing of the fortune Susan was to bring him. "I had no idea Mr. Friend could be so liberal, my dear," she said to Mrs. Friend; "you have such simple tastes and live so quietly that I took you

for people of quite moderate means; but it seems he's a man of fortune after all. Twenty thousand pounds; and more, I have no doubt, at his death?"

Mrs. Friend did not smile at the lady's impertinence—she was incapable of indignation at it in any case—being overwhelmed with her astonishment. "Twenty thousand pounds!" she exclaimed, thunderstruck. "My dear Lady Anne! It is not possible he should have promised her that?"

"Nonsense, my dear; you don't mean to say you didn't know it? What curious creatures men are, to be sure! One would think Mr. Friend would have done his utmost to trumpet the knowledge of her fortune abroad, instead of keeping it so dark. But it's the fact, I assure you; Thomas told me in the most positive manner that Mr. Friend had promised him twenty thousand pounds with Susan."

It was a mystery to Mrs. Friend, who did not know how her husband could be worth as many hundreds. She could say nothing to Lady Anne; but she returned to London and took up her abode in her new and splendid mansion with a sorely troubled mind.

North now found himself in an entirely new world; where he would have been lost indeed but for the kindly help and companionship given him by Friend. His duties, the class of men by whom he was surrounded and the subject filling their minds were all strange to him; and he was as nervous and uneasy as a timid boy on his first night at a new school. He went in terror of being dismissed from his employment for incompetence, of exposing his terrible knowledge of low life. He need not have been afraid. His attainments were quite equal to those of most of the young clerks of his standing; and as for his knowledge of sporting circles, it would have made him the admiration and envy of the majority of his companions had he but allowed it to be

visible. Seeing how lonely and diffident the lad seemed, Friend afforded him his companionship freely. No father could have taken more pains to encourage and support an only son; but there was no affectation of fatherliness about his manner; he treated Will frankly, as one man of the world another. And Will found that he had in him a guide, perhaps the most competent in England, to the labyrinth of political life to which he was now introduced. Friend knew everything and was at home everywhere. Without being a member of Parliament himself or holding any post under Government, he had as intimate and accurate a knowledge of all that went on as if he had been closely concerned in the workings of the machine. From the movements of Napoleon down to the latest squib of Canning or rumor among the pamphleteers, he had the earliest information. He was acquainted with all the actors in public life, it seemed, from the King on the throne down to the very printers' devils who carried off the reports of the last debate in the House. He introduced Will to many political characters; to Mr. Hammond and Mr. Yorke, the Under-Secretaries of State; to Mr. Whitbread, the wealthy Whig brewer who had led the attack on Lord Melville in the House; to William Cobbett, not yet made famous by prosecution; and to many who were aiding the national struggle in obscure situations. Through him Will met Captain Wright, who had carried over the conspirators in Cadoudal's plot against Napoleon and many a royal exile of France on errands of intrigue; M. Jean Peltier, the editor of the little news sheet *L'Ambigu*, whose prosecution two years before for libel on the First Consul had raised so much stir; he seemed to have a large acquaintance among the army of Pitt's agents, and those who were working, some for their private ends and some few, perhaps, out of patriotism, for the Third Coalition, for Europe, for England, or

against the common enemy of all, Napoleon. His knowledge was evidently exhaustive, yet his exact status or occupation remained a mystery.

The Parliamentary people were in acute excitement—even if possible beyond their wont—over the blow to the Government given by the disgrace of Lord Melville; and the Whigs, jubilant, declared that Pitt could never stand the shock, and that his fall was imminent. North had lately been in a Whig circle. Lord Combleigh was a loud admirer of Fox, as was to be expected of a would-be intimate of Carlton House; but Will took little interest in politics, and if he called himself a Whig it was without any deep conviction. Now, indeed, his knowledge of his late patron inclined him rather to range himself on the other side. He supposed Friend to be a Tory; at any rate he seemed on the best terms with the men in office, but he maintained great reserve about his opinions. In fact he did not concern himself much about Parliamentary politics; what chiefly engaged his attention was the active side of affairs. He took the kindest interest in Will's work and gave him much useful advice, so that he formed the habit of going to him in all his difficulties and telling him everything of interest that passed. Friend encouraged him to apply himself to political affairs. "You musn't look to being a clerk all your life, my lad," he said. "You must get on, you know; make your value felt. Get the hang of things thoroughly, and then when you see an opportunity you can grasp it. Follow up the acquaintances you're making; they're useful men; they are men who are doing something. You never can tell where your chance may come from; keep hold of the threads."

Will heard with enthusiastic acquiescence, and was prepared to consecrate himself to the task with almost religious zeal; but he discovered gradually that religious zeal was not wanted. He was amazed to see how coolly

most of the men around him took their work. The only spark of enthusiasm he discovered anywhere was that of hatred; one or two French emigrants who devoted themselves to intrigues against the Emperor really seemed to be inspired with sentiments elevated or possibly degraded by disinterested passion. He looked to Friend for an example of how to bear himself, how to feel, in his new duties; but he could not quite understand his attitude. To all men he was the same; easy, cheerful, open, and yet most reticent. He went everywhere and heard everything and said nothing, except at the right moment, when his words were few and very much to the point. Acquainted with everyone himself, he was really known to none. He had no friendships, no intimacies; he belonged to no club; he was a man of few affections, and admitted no one to his inmost thoughts, genial in temper and sociable in habit though he was. This was his nature as well as his professional custom. He admitted to Will that it was his business to know all and be known to none; to pass for a familiar face and a figure standing for certain qualities such as reliability and secrecy, but no more; to excite no attention, above all by any appearance of mystery. Will did not quite understand it. He preferred direct actions and results; he would have liked to distinguish himself and gain for his reward the good opinion and admiration of those he worked for. But all was so strange and bewildering to him in his new surroundings that he felt unable to criticize or even form an opinion; and certainly the more he saw of Friend the more he admired and revered him. The power of the man made itself felt; and his exceeding kindness, the frank goodwill and the consideration he habitually showed to the feelings all about him, would have won his affection on his account, if on Susan's he had not been prepared to respect him.

Friend cautioned Will against bringing any word of

business into the home circle. The two lives were to be absolutely distinct; and Will noticed how rigorously he himself kept them apart. No one of his public acquaintances was aware of the existence of Mrs. Friend, it seemed, unless since the recent visit to Brighton; and the wife and daughter knew nothing whatever of his daily occupations. This, too, was a hard rule to Will North, who loved nothing better than talking about his own affairs when he could find a sympathetic listener. He had learned silence in the hardships and loneliness of his life; he was far too sensitive to rebuffs to give his confidence uninvited; but now that he had listeners whose greatest pleasure was to hear of all he did and thought, he found it difficult to hold his tongue. But for some weeks he saw little of Mrs. Friend and Susan. He had been surprised when he found Friend devoting so much time to him, for at Brighton he had not taken much notice of him; it was to Mrs. Friend that he had looked for kindness and sympathy. But now the case was reversed. He hardly knew how it was, but though Friend pressed him to come often to Harley Street and drop in when he liked, he did not seem able to accept as he longed to do. He was much engaged at his office, for one thing; and when he did go, the sight of Raby in close attendance on Susan drove him to the depths of despair. Friend had told him of the match that was in contemplation; and to see her the future bride of another was more than he could bear.

Mr. Raby's suit, however, was making no progress. Susan was steady in her refusals; and though always gentle in her manner, for she found herself liking him more than she had thought possible, her determination against him began to make itself clear to her aunt, and she told her husband she feared he had no chance. But the wooer himself would not believe it; and Friend encouraged him to persevere.

Their style of life had undergone a change since the Brighton visit. Before that event they lived entirely to themselves; they had no friends, and went out nowhere but to church. But Lady Anne, on their leaving Brighton, had given them introductions; and since moving to Harley Street one or two of their new neighbors had called on them; so that though they had no large circle of acquaintance, visitors were no longer unknown. But a knock at the door one evening when Friend was out was followed by the entrance of a stranger, a foreigner, who gave the name of M. Sauvignac and asked for Friend.

Mrs. Friend was surprised. Such an event was unprecedented. Though she knew her husband had a large acquaintance, yet he never brought them to the house. She told the visitor that her husband was out, and hoped he would then leave; but he begged permission to await his return. He was an old colleague of Mr. Friend abroad, he said, and had come to England on business of the highest importance. He had missed him at their appointed meeting place, and had with great difficulty traced him to his private address. It was of the utmost consequence that they should meet; and in truth he was not anxious, he said, to face the streets again; he had already run some chance of being mobbed. This might be true enough, Mrs. Friend was aware; for public feeling ran so high and hot against the French that if he had been recognized as one of that nation his predicament might have been awkward. She felt she had no alternative but to ask him to stay and await her husband.

M. Sauvignac was overwhelmed with gratitude. His manners were the pink of politeness. His compliments to her and, discreetly veiled, to Susan, were models of the art. He talked much and entertainingly of French life and of adventures with her husband in France. It

was apparent that his visits there had been neither rare nor distant. And other information crept out. "Mr. Friend speaks French like a native; just like a native," said Sauvignac, whose own English was remarkably good. "No one could know, no one could guess M. Henri Dubois to be an Englishman. You know Mr. Friend passes as Henri Dubois when he visits our country? It is his name over there: in our trade one has many names. All would think he was born a Frenchman. But he was educated as a boy partly in France, he tells me."

Susan's interest flared up. A question was at the tip of her tongue, but it was repressed by a look from Mrs. Friend. M. Sauvignac seemed to perceive it was a dangerous topic, for he glided dexterously off it and kept the conversation in impersonal channels until Friend returned.

His wife ran out to meet him as she heard his knock, to tell him of the visitor. His face darkened ominously. "*Who* did you say was here?" he asked.

"Monsieur Sauvignac; he says he is an old colleague of yours abroad. I hope I have not done wrong in keeping him?"

"No, no, my dear," said Friend hastily, turning away from her and dashing upstairs to the drawing room. His brow wore its blackest danger signal; but she heard his voice with its accustomed heartiness greeting the visitor: "*Ah, cher monsieur, quel surprise!*" and he immediately led him downstairs to the library. Their conversation took place in French, which translated would run somewhat as follows.

"Good heavens, monsieur, what an imprudence!" exclaimed Friend.

"Have you not received my letter, then?"

"Letter? No. Why have you come to London?"

"To see you, my friend. Surely you expected me?"

"Not without warning; and not here. Why did you not send word to me to join you at Hythe?"

"I wrote, saying unless you met me there I should come to London. It has miscarried, then; or perhaps it is only delayed."

"You sent it by the usual channel?"

"Certainly. Ah, it must be safe. Well, no matter, my friend; let me tell my errand. I come straight from Turin, where I have been attending the coronation of the Emperor as King of Italy. One more step gained! He approves your scheme, and I am to carry back to him all the details. He is unable yet to fix the time; all depends on Admiral Villeneuve's return from the Indies. No news has yet reached us from him; have you heard anything?"

"Not yet; but I have improved my communications with the Admiralty: I have means of intelligence there now, and I have made some important acquaintances. Whatever is known there I shall hear as soon as it reaches London."

"Good! You are an admirable fellow, *mon cher*; you are unique! Well, as soon as Villeneuve returns, he is to reinforce himself at the Spanish ports, defeat Cornwallis, and then make for Boulogne, and there guard the Channel while we cross. It is your part to prepare our landing as you suggested."

"Well, I believe the thing is feasible. But you say it depends on Villeneuve's return? Suppose Nelson intercepts him?"

"He shall not intercept him, my friend; our Emperor's star shines on him for victory. But if he does, what then? Six hours will be enough to see us across; and on a dark night, what is to give Cornwallis the alarm?"

"That's what I want to know. Will the Emperor risk it in the absence of Villeneuve's fleet?"

"It may be; but at present we wait for him. If he comes not, then the Emperor may decide to strike independently of his ships."

"Well, I had better make the arrangements. I shall want some weeks; at least a month. This is June 28th; I can't be ready till the end of July, according to the present plan."

"That is all right. The Emperor will not leave Turin till the 8th of next month; he will proceed to Boulogne at its close. You shall have plenty of time. And what is a change of plan to you? You are as full of schemes as a silkworm moth is of eggs. The Emperor relies on you. You are sure to be ready."

"Well, I'll do my best; I can do no more. I have some fresh intelligence for him about the coast defenses; I have been down at Brighton lately studying the camps and the Volunteer movement."

"Invaluable man! Why, the chief glory of our Emperor's career, the conquest of your stubborn, arrogant country, will all be owing to you! You lay a throne at the Emperor's feet. What a glory for you!"

"I hope it will be worth something more than glory to me, or I should not trouble myself about it. But the Emperor understands the worth of intelligent service as well as any man."

"Ah, he is a generous master."

"But come, Sauvignac, what are we to do with you? I can give you a bed for tonight, but no longer; and it is not safe for you to be loose on the London streets. Did you meet with no adventures on your way to town?"

"I did with one or two. Coming through Maidstone I was mobbed by a crowd; but my horse was good and I was able to escape. And I think a word or two of my business had gone about the coast. There was a good deal of stir at Folkestone, where I landed."

"You are rashest, the most imprudent of mortals!"

Why did you not land at Hythe, and wait at my rooms till you heard from me?"

"The time was pressing, my friend. My business was to reach you as soon as possible."

"But how to get you back again? I can ship you across from Hythe; but if the country's roused it will be a deuced difficult job to get you safely there. You must lie up a bit in London till we hear how things are looking. You will be safe at the Running Horse in Southwark, if you will only stay there and not show yourself outside."

"If only the landlord of the Running Horse has a pretty wife or daughter, I shall be glad enough to do that, *mon cher*."

"And then we must trust to the chapter of accidents. I must go down to Hythe myself to arrange our affair there; but to go with you seems risky, and to let you go alone is madness. But I will think out some plan. In the meantime, you are my guest for tonight."

He took him upstairs to the drawing room, and told his wife to see that a room was prepared.

CHAPTER X

YOUNG LOVE TRIUMPHANT

THIS then was the secret of John Friend's wealth and position. He was in the pay of Napoleon as a spy on his own country.

His father, a man of good standing, had unfortunately inherited a title to a large property consisting partly of money in the Funds and partly of a West Indian estate; but his right was disputed by a distant relative. The latter had the longer purse, and used it in the adoption of every device known to chicanery to wear down his adversary. The suit dragged on for more than forty years; and though his advisers always assured Mr. Friend that his claim should succeed, he was ruined before he could obtain a decision. The property therefore fell to the other claimant; and Mr. Friend, after five years' exile, died at Boulogne a broken hearted man. Young Friend passed his boyhood under the shadow of this disastrous suit. Being left destitute on the death of his father, interest was made to get him a subordinate post in a Government Office. He was then barely sixteen, but soon distinguished himself by his intelligence and industry. He was transferred to the Foreign Office, where he rapidly rose to a position of confidence.

But he meant to make money. He was utterly unscrupulous and of an intellect that delighted in intrigue. He had had no moral training, and only the perfunctory religious instruction of a public school: for his father

was a freethinker and a sceptic; in his younger and more prosperous days, a scoffer like his master Voltaire, and latterly a bitter and envenomed hater of Christianity. The son had grown up constantly hearing that he was defrauded of his rights; that Government was in league with the oppressor to rob him; that there was no justice to be looked for from the laws, and no hope of redress that he did not exact for himself. So being of great ambition and strong will, he determined to make the best position he could for himself by any means which came in his way.

But for a time it seemed that honesty was the best policy, and he served his employers faithfully; though owing to his peculiar talent for secret and involved transactions he was always the man to be chosen in matters where finesse rather than blunt honesty was required. Without interest and with nothing to aid him but the force of his own ability, he raised himself to as high a position as was possible to be attained in the office; but he was not satisfied; and believing that no further opening was to be found there, he quitted the Foreign Office in the year 1786, and returned to France, where he gave a close study to the causes of the Revolution, which he foresaw and prophesied. Speaking French perfectly, and familiar with all parties there, he was much employed by the émigrés and their friends in England to assist the escape of proscribed individuals and families. He was also furnishing regular information to the English Government as to the progress of events and the temper of the different parties in France. In 1791 he returned to England, and made the acquaintance of Mr. Henry Norman and his daughter and niece, with the latter of whom he quickly fell in love. He asked permission to pay his addresses; but her uncle, though he had been strongly attracted by him at first, had grown to feel uneasy about his position and character as he

knew him better; and told him that he could not with a safe conscience entrust his niece's happiness to his keeping. But Mary Norman was twenty-three years old, and her little fortune was in her own hands. Her uncle remonstrated with her in vain. She insisted on marrying Friend; and his only resource was to threaten to disown her, and to forbid her to hold any communication with her cousin Margaret, to whom she was deeply attached. Of course his threats had no more weight than is usual in such cases. Mary Norman married John Friend, and her uncle kept his word.

It was not until 1796, however, that Friend began a systematic course of treachery. In that year he was sent abroad to gather information for the Government about the French invasion of Ireland, which he accomplished so successfully as to win high encomiums from Lord Downshire and Pitt; but he also made use of his opportunities to establish an understanding with the French leader, Hoche, whom he supplied with intelligence from the English Foreign Office, thus playing off one side skilfully against the other. On Bonaparte's becoming First Consul, he entered into a regular arrangement with him to send him news of all that might affect him; and though he was still employed by Pitt and the various Ministers for Foreign Affairs as a trustworthy agent and collector of information, he kept up the double game with the greatest skill and spirit, and betrayed the French to the English and the English to the French, with a nice discrimination of how far it was safe to go which had as yet preserved him from all suspicion.

With such a man as this in the case, it had not been by chance alone that Will North found himself unable to approach Susan as he longed to do, and as her guardian invited him,—when, however, he had previously assured himself that Will could not come. Friend meant to make use of North's affection for his wife and daughter. It

was with this design that he had procured him his post; but he did not want his love for Susan to interfere with Raby's suit, and thought him best kept off the scene till that had been brought to a successful issue. But whether it were on his account or not, Susan could not be brought to reconsider her reply. Friend spoke to her himself at last, when his wife had said all she ventured to say without success.

"Well, Sukey, my girl," he began; "so you will have nothing to say to poor Raby?"

"Dear Daddy!—I—I can't."

"Can't you love? Now tell me, my child, what your objection is. Have you got anyone else in your mind?"

Susan looked down and shook her head. I am afraid she was not candid; but then candor on such a point demands either unusual honesty and vigor of mind, or a perfect reliance on the sympathy of the listener. Susan loved and admired her Daddy Friend with all her heart; but she never looked for sympathy from him with the subtleties of feminine fancy.

"Well, my dear, I know it's no use pressing a girl for her reasons. It's a case of Doctor Fell. But, Sukey, it's a serious matter, my love. Here's a chance of establishing your happiness for your whole life, such a chance as may never come again. Here's a young man, an honest, worthy fellow, devoted to you, who is sure to make you a kind husband, and with everything to offer that the world can give. If you can bring yourself to think you could take him, you would lack nothing that the world considers can give happiness. You must think, my dear, what you want your future to be. You know you cannot live with us forever: you are young and will outlive us; and though I hope to be able to make provision for you, yet it would be a dreary life for you if you had made no new ties. And what sort of life do you think will suit you best, Sukey? I think

you enjoyed your taste of high life at Brighton; it seemed to me that you showed decided talents for society. You can't pretend you don't care about fine clothes and position and plenty of admiration, my dear. You have spirit and ambition, Sukey. You are young yet, and I suppose think that love alone will be enough to fill your life. When you are ten years older you will find that it is not the only thing, and that it's a hard lot where love has to struggle single handed against everything else. I don't want you to marry without affection, my dear. No life is worth living without love; but can't you learn to feel a kindness for poor Raby, who loves you so dearly, and with whom you would have not only affection, but all the other good things of life as well—fortune, position, admiration, power?"

Susan looked down and was silent.

"He's not the sort of man I could care for," she faltered at last. "He's so—so old and dull;—I mean, he only cares for Parliament and business and things."

"And you, Sukey. He cares for you more than for Parliament and business and all the other things."

"He's very good to me, I confess."

"But still you don't think you could bear him as a lifelong companion? Well, my love, I will never force your inclinations. You are your own mistress, Susan. But, my dear, remember this; that if you can bring yourself to accept Mr. Raby, I shall be most heartily rejoiced; and for my own sake as well as because I believe it will secure your happiness. Your marriage with him would be of the greatest possible service to me. So you see, my love, I am not altogether disinterested in my advice to you to take him," he concluded with a smile.

Susan caught his hand and kissed it. "Dearest Daddy!" she cried. "I wish I could! For your sake I could almost wish—I should like——"

"Well, my dear, will you try? Will you think if you can do it?"

"O Daddy, it is no use! I should like to please you—but marry him?—no, I can't."

"I am sorry, my dear," said Friend gently. He said no more, and left the room. Susan felt miserable, and guilty of blackest ingratitude.

Such was the effect his words had on her that she might have been induced to follow his advice and at least consider the possibility of bringing herself to tolerate Mr. Raby as a lover, if just at this crisis Will North had not reappeared. It was a Sunday afternoon. Friend had not asked him lately to call, but he could no longer keep away. Mrs. Friend was at church, he was told, but Mr. Friend and Miss Marny were within. He was shown into the drawing room, where Susan was alone.

She had been thinking about Mr. Raby, and sadly reflecting that North seemed to have dropped out of her life, and that there was little chance that they should ever approach even as near to each other as they had been at Brighton, when he entered the room.

"Mr. North!" she exclaimed, the color leaving her cheeks.

"Miss Marny!"

He was equally at a loss. "I believe, Miss Marny—I hear—I have to congratulate you."

"To congratulate me, Mr. North? On what?"

"On your approaching marriage with Mr. Raby."

"I am not going to marry Mr. Raby!" exclaimed Susan. "O, Mr. North! How could you think it?" The color rushed back to her face in a flood.

"You are not? Thank heaven!" He came one pace nearer.

Susan laughed. "Why do you thank heaven, Mr.

North? Surely that is not very polite of you, to poor Mr. Raby at any rate. He is an excellent match, I am told."

"No doubt; and I have nothing to offer you; I am worth nothing in the world; but I love you with all my heart and soul, Miss Marny; I have not a thought in my mind that does not begin and end with you; and if I had seen you another's, I think it would have killed me." She did not speak. "Do with me what you will; trample me under foot if you like. I am yours to the last drop of blood in my body, and I shall die happy now I have told you."

She said nothing. "Well? Have you nothing to say to me? You despise me too much to answer?"

"What do you want me to say?" asked Susan in the smallest possible voice.

"What do I——?" He looked at her, and the truth dawned on him. She wavered towards him; he sprang to her, and she fell into his arms.

They were still locked in an embrace when Friend entered the room. "Hello!" he exclaimed. They started asunder.

"I am surprised," he said gravely. "Pray has this been going on long?"

"I have only been here these few minutes," stammered North.

"I mean your understanding with Miss Marny. I thought, Susan, that you told me your affections were disengaged?"

"They were: at least—I did not know——"

"And since when is it that you have known?"

"It is only this minute that we have understood each other," said North. "I know, Mr. Friend, that I have nothing to offer Miss Marny; but I love her with all my heart."

"We had better talk of this in private," said Friend.

"Come with me, young man. Don't be afraid, Susan; I am not going to eat him."

He led him downstairs and into the library. "I don't know that there is anything to be said, however," he said. "I believe I know all that you do of your circumstances. You must be aware that I expect Susan to make a brilliant match; and that in any case I should be very chary of giving my consent to a marriage which did not offer the best prospects for her happiness."

"I hope her happiness at least would be secure with me," said Will. "All that a man can do to make her happy I will; and if the devotion of my whole life——"

"No doubt; but it's rather a question of position than devotion, my young friend. You barely earn your own living as yet. Now, Susan is born for society. She is full of spirit; and though she's at the romantic age at present, you'll find she needs a career for herself later on. Girls of her age are apt to think that love outweighs the whole world; but did you ever know a woman of thirty who was of the same opinion? No, my friend; you must put this nonsense out of your head, and not think of taking a wife till you are able to support one."

"That's impossible, Mr. Friend, now that I am privileged to think that her happiness depends on me. You may talk as you like about what she will want when she's thirty; but she is old enough now to choose for herself, and she has made her choice."

"Oh, come, I am not going to argue with a lover," said Friend good-humoredly. "I have said my say, and there's an end of it. Good-by, North; we may keep our friendship at the Admiralty, I hope; but I can't ask you here again at present."

"I suppose not, sir. But you will not consider I am betraying any confidence or acting dishonorably if I take steps to see or correspond with Miss Marny, should

she desire it? For it is by her wishes rather than yours that I am bound to be guided."

Friend laughed. "I see, Will; you give me fair warning. Well, it shall be my concern to prevent that, if necessary; and I won't accuse you of acting dishonorably. Good-by, my dear fellow."

They shook hands and parted; and Friend returned to Susan. "Well, Sukey, so this is why you said No to poor Raby. You had young North in your head all the time."

Susan hung her head and made no reply.

"You sly little baggage! Well, the mischief's done now and can't be helped. But, my dear, I'm afraid you've made a peck of trouble for yourself. Poor young North has his way to make in the world: he can barely support himself yet; it'll be years before he can afford to marry; and then he'll find a wife and family like a clog round his neck; he'll never rise so burdened." He said no more; but it was enough to cloud her happiness; almost enough to make her wonder if she ought not to give him up. Not quite, however. Youthful hope and confidence were too strong in her.

Mrs. Friend, of course, took the part of the lovers. She pleaded earnestly with her husband for them. "But, my dear, the lad has not got a farthing," said he. "How can he keep a wife?"

"My love, Lady Anne at Brighton told me that you had offered to give Susan a handsome fortune if she married Mr. Raby. The sum she mentioned sounded preposterous to me; but, allowing for exaggeration, you must still be able to make them comfortable if you like."

"Oh, these women!" groaned Friend. "They get hold of everything. My dear Polly, can't you see the difference between marrying the heir to the Sandown title and a poor fellow like North? For the sake of giving her consequence in a great family like that, I

would strain every nerve to give her a decent fortune; but why should we impoverish ourselves for North, who would love her none the better and can't settle a penny on her?"

"But it would enable the children to be happy, and what better reason for impoverishing ourselves can there be than that? You and I don't need riches, my love."

"But I haven't got them, dear. It's all very well for Lady Anne to talk; you know how things get exaggerated; but it is really not in my power to give Susan anything considerable. I have, it is true, saved up something for her; but the great fortune Lady Anne talked of is purely mythical."

"It must have had some foundation, my dear; she mentioned twenty thousand pounds."

"The deuce she did! What stories people tell!"

"But if it were only half that—and people do not often double the amounts in exaggerating them—it would still be enough for them to live on."

"Well, Polly, I'll tell you this; Susan's marriage to Raby was a special case, and I could do more for her in that instance than any other. The money would not all have come out of my pocket."

"But still you can do something? Husband, let the children be happy."

"Confound the children! Why can't they be happy in my way? I had planned everything so nicely for them; and they must needs go upsetting all my arrangements by falling in love! I wish I were the stern parent in a play; I'd have Will kidnapped and sent to the plantations, and lock up Miss Susan on bread and water until she came to her senses; and then I suppose we should have an elopement in proper style, and I should end by dying miserably in a debtor's prison amid the execrations of the audience. No; the young folks always

carry the day; we elders have no chance against them. All that's left for us to do is to join their hands and give 'em our blessing with a good grace. I suppose I shall have to come round to that at last."

"Thank you, my dearest life! Thank you for saying that! You have indeed given me pleasure!"

"What matchmakers you women are! I suppose because you took young North under your wing when he was hurt, you have always favored him. You love everything that's friendless and downtrodden, don't you, Polly?"

"I can't help wishing them to marry, dearest life; they love one another, and a first love has something so beautiful, so sacred about it. I could not bear my Susan's life to be shadowed just at its start. And as for Will North, I feel I can love him like my own son."

He pressed her hand.

"But mind, Polly, I am not going to give way at once," he said presently. "If there is a chance that Sukey may be induced to change her mind, I won't throw it away. Too much depends on it; I can't give up the Raby connection without a struggle. But if she remains firm, why, then she must have her own way—provoking toad!"

So Friend brought his utmost powers of persuasion to bear on Susan, which were by no means small, since he worked sympathetically on her reason, and enlisted all her affections of older growth in his favor. She never felt, as girls usually do when parents or guardians try to persuade them against their hearts, that Friend did not understand her, and was working against her real interest. She was shaken, but not convinced. Supported by the buoyancy of youth, she managed to resist the pictures of the misery of a life of poverty which he drew, and refused to believe that Will would ever repent of having married her. Gradually Friend convinced himself that she would not change her mind, and turned

to the consideration of what further use he could make of North. He owned to himself that he was not entirely sorry to be rid of the good old Tory connection; the narrow sympathies, the strait-laced proprieties, the bounded outlook of the landed proprietor class, he was beginning to find an insufferable weariness. He had no principles; but he preferred the society of men of bold and speculative minds.

He had already found North of considerable service to him in his occupation as a spy. He often visited him at the Admiralty Offices, and through this introduction had become acquainted with several men of standing there, who, impressed with his knowledge and interest in public matters, had used little caution in their communications to him. Friend's manner invariably inspired confidence; his discretion seemed as conspicuous as his honesty. And at that epoch of national enthusiasm, when one soul animated every one from highest to lowest, and party spirit was almost extinct save in Parliamentary circles, who dreamt that treachery could be at work? So Friend was one of the first to learn of Villeneuve's return from the West Indies, a piece of intelligence which reached London on July the 8th. He made haste to send the news to Napoleon, for so greatly superior were the English cruisers to their enemies that Bonaparte often remained for weeks in ignorance of naval occurrences known in England.

The French spy Sauvignac still lay concealed at the inn at Southwark. Rumors had reached London about his presence in Kent, and Friend had as yet found no way of providing for his escape. So jealously was the coast guarded that it was a very difficult matter to come and go undetected. Friend had his own means indeed at Hythe, the headquarters of the smuggling gangs of Romney Marsh; but he dared not send Sauvignac alone.

Parliament rose on the 12th of July, and Pitt immediately went down to Walmer Castle to inspect batteries, hold reviews, and superintend the progress of the military canal at Hythe, which was now nearly twelve miles long, though it was intended to make it extend for three times that distance. One day about a week later, North joined Friend at an eating-house where they frequently met, in a state of great excitement. Some important despatches had arrived from Lord Nelson, and he was chosen as the messenger to forward them to Pitt.

"'Tis promotion for me, Mr. Friend," said Will, "and I venture to hope 'tis but the first step. I believe I have succeeded in pleasing Mr. Hunt, the chief of my department; and if I acquit myself well over this commission, who knows what further good fortune it may not bring?"

"It's a good beginning, my lad, and I wish you luck with it. 'Tis promising indeed. You start to-morrow?" An idea had entered his head.

"No, on Saturday morning; I have to wait for a letter from Lord Mulgrave, who is to see the King to-morrow. But I am to lose no time on the way; the affair is pressing."

"And where will you find Pitt?"

"At Folkestone, 'tis supposed; but he is to make a tour of inspection round the Cinque Ports, and he may be at Dover or Hastings. Supposing I carry out this business satisfactorily, Mr. Friend, and get a further rise, I hardly dare to presume it would make a difference in your views for Miss Marny?"

"I am not so sure of that, my boy. The women have been talking me round, confound their wheedling tongues! It seems you have managed to bewitch Susan entirely; she declares, and her aunt supports her, that she'll never be happy without you. What's a poor

guardian to do when the women are all against him? I can't let Susan break her heart."

"God bless you for those words, Mr. Friend! Give me but a hope, and you'll see how I'll work for Susan."

"You'll have to, my boy. I can't give my girl to a fool or a failure; you must prove your mettle before you take her. But I suppose you'll get her in the end; and I want you to do her credit. Look here; what do you say to my joining you in your ride into Kent? I have a bit of business I want to see to. The fact is I have a friend I want to ship off quietly; a Frenchman who has got himself smuggled over to see about some family matters, and whom I shall be glad to see safe off again; the foolish fellow has no papers, and is in some little danger of being arrested as a spy. If we go with you, your character as a Government messenger will make all safe for him. Our ways will lie together, as I take him to Hythe."

"I shall be delighted, Mr. Friend, both to have your company and to be able to be of any service to you."

"Well, we'll call it arranged, then. You start first thing on Saturday? I'll meet you at the Admiralty. What hour do you start?"

"I am to be there for the despatches at nine."

"All right; I'll meet you there. And you can look in at Harley Street this evening, if you like, to tell Susan your good news. There; now you'll cry quits, I fancy."

"Never; I am a thousandfold and eternally your debtor, Mr. Friend. I can't even express my thanks and gratitude."

"Never mind them, my lad. Well, good-by; I shall see you this evening, I suppose."

CHAPTER XI

A LOVERS' MEETING

So William North presented himself in Harley Street in the character of an accepted lover; and Susan with a lovely color in her cheeks flitted across the passage before him into the parlor where they were to have their first meeting as a betrothed couple. He closed the door, and catching her hand began to kiss it passionately; then he secured both, sank on his knee and kissed as though he would devour them. She smiled, well pleased.

"Susan, Susan! How I love you! More than my life!" he exclaimed ecstatically.

"Truly?" she whispered, thrilled with delight.

"Truly, most truly. I love you more than all the world and all that it contains; more than I can say; more than I can know. Look on me, my angel, and read for yourself if it is not true."

"I know," she breathed. "I knew from the first time we saw each other—I felt you loved me, as I loved you."

"You loved me, Susan?" Transported, he caught her in his arms with greater ardor than tenderness. She was frightened by his violence, and struggled against him unavailingly. "Let me go; let me go! O Mr. North, don't!" Terror sounded in her voice. He released her instantly.

"Did I frighten you? Was I too bold? Dearest, don't be frightened of me; I would not harm you for

anything. Dearest, dearest Susan, you must not fear me."

"You must be gentle with me," said Susan pleadingly. "Indeed I do not fear you; but I am not used to roughness."

"My beloved! I will control myself," said Will. "I love you so much, that I would give my life to save you from the slightest pain of fear. Forgive me, my life; I will keep a better watch on myself. You don't know how passionately I love you."

"But if you love me, you ought to wish to please me," said Susan.

"I do; I do. Only teach me how to please you, my beloved; I will frame all my conduct by your directions. I have been trained in a rough school, Susan; my life has been a hard and brutal one, surrounded by vice and cruelty. Forgive me if I show myself tainted by it. You must lift me out of the mire, my best and dearest: help me to make myself more worthy of you; Heaven knows I have sunk deep enough. But your purity will raise me. Angel that you are, you will teach me how to deserve the blessing of your love."

"I will try," said Susan, thrilled with delight. "But, dear William"—she blushed and hesitated over the name—"You must teach me, too. You must not think I am an angel and perfectly good. You are good too; so much better and stronger than I! You must help and support me; I am only a poor weak little thing that wants to lean on your strength."

Will repudiated this with all his might. He protested against the blasphemy of supposing he could be her equal; but inwardly he was transported by the loveliness of her believing it. Susan felt herself in a seventh heaven. The reality was even better than her dreams. She rebuked her lover gently for his exaltation of her, but she thought it the proper and fitting frame of mind.

for him; it was not because she disapproved but because she thought deprecation of his praises the proper and fitting part for her to take, that she rebuked him. She felt that his worship gave her an ideal to live up to; she had now to show herself worthy of it. Poor child, her proposal to be taught by him was a very conventional one. She had endowed him with all manner of imaginary virtues, but his real ones she had neither the insight nor the strength of mind to profit by. The sincerity and single-mindedness of his love, for instance, was quite beyond her power to copy. Hers was partly feminine delight in being loved and pleasure in his admiration—gratified vanity, in short, though vanity of the most innocent kind—and partly worship of her own romantic ideal, with which she had identified him merely because he had appeared at the psychological moment, stood six feet high without his shoes, and possessed a remarkably handsome figure and face. She credited him with all the virtues she admired because her self-esteem demanded that the man she loved should possess them. Her intention, unexpressed even to herself, was of flinging herself morally upon his neck and making him bear the burden of her shortcomings. She was to be raised by his virtues, but by no exertion of her own.

“Ours is to be a perfect love, is it not?” said Susan, smiling at him as he sat at her feet. “We shall trust one another absolutely, and have no secrets from each other, and share all our thoughts and hopes, and each try to raise the other. Do you know, it seems to me that love at its highest, a love like ours, is something very sacred, very holy.”

“It is; it is,” agreed Will rapturously, kissing her shoes.

“When I first woke up to know its meaning,” proceeded Susan, the color deepening in her cheeks “—it

was that day at Brighton, you know, when Mr. Armour began persecuting me—I was frightened and shocked. Up till then I had thought that men had no other idea when they loved but of pleasing and honoring and serving the woman they admired. I could not understand how there could be such a thing as a selfish love, a love which seeks nothing but its own gratification; and when I realized that those young men cared nothing for me—for my real self, my mind, my spirit—I was quite horrified and ready to think that all men's love was debasing. It was only when I learnt to know you," said Susan, unconsciously misrepresenting the growth of her ideas, "that I discovered what a power to uplift it might be."

"When you learnt to know me? Me? Ah, Susan, if you only knew how unworthy I am of you—have been, at least; for please God I will never sink so low again. My angel, if all women were like you, what a different place the world would be."

"Is it so bad?" said Susan, enjoying her rôle intensely. "But we two will do what we can to make it better, will we not? I believe, do you know, that even two who are strong in love and good purposes, may do a great deal to improve those around them."

"You may; you do. What can be out of the power of an angel like you to effect? O Susan, my beloved, make me more worthy of you!"

"You are worthy; you are," said Susan, laying her hand gently on his hair. "You are not like those selfish, low-minded men. You love my mind, not my face alone."

"Yes, divinely lovely as your person is—fit shrine of such a soul," said Will, falling again to kissing her shoes, "it is the least of your beauties. I loved you the first minute I saw you, Susan; and yet even then it was the lovely spirit looking from your eyes that

drew me to your feet. It was because I could see how good you were that I loved you. And yet how little I dreamt of what you really were!"

There was a rapturous silence, while he devoured her hand with kisses, feeling himself whirled to giddy heights of undreamed-of ecstasies.

"And there is another thing I want to say," proceeded Susan. "I believe that there should be an absolute trust between those who love one another. There should be no doubts and jealousies possible. Let us promise, dear William, always to share all our thoughts; to tell each other not only all we do, but all we think and feel. I will tell you what I believe would be the only thing fatal to my love, the only way in which you could make me hate you; and that would be if ever you began to suspect and doubt me, and would not tell me openly what you thought. I could not endure that. I promise you, William, that I will always be open, and truthful to you. Will you promise me the same?"

"I will; I swear it!" vowed Will, sealing his oath with kisses on her hand. "Don't speak, don't dream of my ever doubting you, Susan, my divinity; I could as soon suspect the sun in heaven, as soon dream of doubting Holy Writ. And to be open and truthful to you—why, it will be my greatest joy to keep my soul open to you as a book. Yes, you shall write in it as well as read."

"Ah, we shall be happy together!" sighed Susan.

Will cast a rapid glance backwards and forwards over his life. He could not bring the murkiness of his past before her in detail now; some day he would confess and receive absolution for all. But his future should be spent under her eyes; she should choose his path for him; she should know everything he did and hoped. Joyfully he poured out to her the news of his commission and his hopes of distinguishing himself and con-

sequent advancement. She heard with deepest interest and sympathy. In this moment of intense feeling a confidence even on a mundane matter was sacred. It was a token of the union of their souls; and she felt the occasion sacramental.

Their conversation ceased for a while to be personal as Will described his employment, the men he met, and the deep impression made on him by Friend's quiet power and unpretentious but inexhaustible knowledge of public affairs. Susan heard with an interest lively as his own. She had always loved and admired her "Daddy Friend" most deeply. His somewhat rare appearances during her childhood had made him an impressive figure. His arrival had been the signal for universal good spirits and a sense of holiday. There was no difficulty he could not overcome, no cloud he could not clear away. And now her admiration was spreading from private and personal grounds to public ones. She learnt that he was as great in the difficulties of the nation as in dealing with an impertinent landlady or the vulgar curiosity of an intrusive neighbor; that members of Parliament and Secretaries of State held him as high in their esteem as did Betty and Jacky in the kitchen. She began to feel herself capable of understanding the mysteries that surrounded him; and a vision darted across her mind of a time when she as well as Will might be admitted to his secrets, and—who knows?—perhaps she herself, obscure little Susan Marny, might by some happy chance be the instrument to deliver England from the giant grasp of Napoleon. Susan's idler dreams were very little conditioned by probability or even possibility; but she had the sense not to dwell on these most wild of her fancies.

They were interrupted at last by a tap at the door. "Children," said Mrs. Friend's voice, "it is getting late. It is time that Will was going."

"Going?" said Will. "O Susan! how can I tear myself from you?"

She smiled. She felt no reluctance to be left with her memories and dreams; but they did not offer the same consolation to her lover, who desired only her living presence. "Come, we must say farewell," she said. "It is but for a short time."

"Who knows? And long or short, the shortest time is endless to me. I leave my very life—part of myself, with you, my beloved, when I go from you."

"Ah, and all my thoughts and hopes go with you. You take my heart with you when you go."

"Susan, my angel! Say it again! Tell me, do you really and truly love me?"

Susan looked up at him with shy coquetry. "You must find that out for yourself," she said; and then, suddenly relenting as she read the ardor and sincerity of his gaze, "Indeed I love you with all my heart and soul."

He caught her in his embrace and kissed her passionately. She submitted at first, half pleased, half frightened at his warmth; and when she judged she had allowed enough indulgence, tried to free herself; but she might as well have struggled against bars of iron. "Enough, enough, dear William!" she entreated. "Let me go—do let me go! You are hurting me. Mr. North, set me free!" But blind and deaf with passion, Will did not heed. Angered and terrified, she fought with all her strength. Her struggles brought him to his senses: he released her; and she sprang away from him to the further side of the room, where she faced him, panting with breath.

"You ought not: you ought to let me go when I tell you!" she cried reproachfully when she had gathered breath. "How dare you! how can you, when you say you love me so much?"

"It is just because I love you so much that I am carried beyond myself, Susan," he replied, penitent and ashamed. "Forgive me, my dearest. In truth, I love you so wildly I know not what I do. It is stronger than I."

"You must not let it be stronger; you must control yourself," declared Susan sternly. "An uncontrolled passion is mere weakness. I will be loved in no such fashion."

He rushed across the room and fell on his knees to seize her hand. "Forgive me, my best and dearest! I will try not to offend again. But you don't know what a man's love is, or you would not talk of control. Control the movements of the sun; control the course of time; but don't attempt to control a lover in the presence of his adored."

"Now you talk just as Mr. Armour or Lord Combleigh might," said Susan. "What nonsense—what degrading nonsense are you uttering?"

"Ah, don't liken me to them, Susan. You are right; I can and will control myself. But oh, Susan, you little know the forces you have wakened!" He was all flushed and disheveled with passion and with the stress of his embrace; the sweat stood on his brow; tears were in his eyes. Susan, dainty and trim and cool, was repelled by the sight of him.

"I don't want to be loved in that fashion," she said coldly. "I want affection."

"I offer her my heart's best blood—I pour her out the purest, hottest passion; and she wants affection!" he cried in despair. "Susan, Susan! Don't you know what manner of being a man is?"

It was precisely what she did not know; and she did not quite relish the knowledge she was gaining. "I know what the man I love must be," she said, still coldly. "Good-night, Mr. North," and she laid her

hand on the door-handle. He seized it and held it still. "You shall not go—you must not leave me, Susan, till you have forgiven me. You will forgive me, will you not? You must forgive me, dearest; my fault is nothing but my exceeding love for you. I am in your hands; you shall make of me what you will. You shall teach me to love you just as you choose; I will be all—all that you wish: only do not forsake me, Susan; do not leave me in anger. Say you forgive me, my best and dearest; my only hope, my only joy."

"I forgive you; I cannot help it," said Susan slowly. "For I love you; I have said it. But Will—dear William, if you want me to have any pleasure in my love, if you really love me and seek my happiness, you must study to love me in my way, not in yours."

"I will, I will," said her lover, fervently kissing her hand, and vowing a deep oath in his soul to frame himself entirely by her wishes. He was too much moved for speech; but Susan felt his sincerity. She smiled at him; gently drew away her hands, lightly stroked his bowed head; and slipped through the door. Friend's voice was calling them from the next room.

CHAPTER XII

SUSAN'S DISCOVERY

FRIEND breakfasted early the next morning with Susan, as he had to go to Southwark to prepare Sauvignac for their journey, and carried a tray up to his wife with her tea and toast daintily set forth. He stayed waiting on her and chatting while she ate it, and then departed to go about his errand. But on taking his coat down from its peg he discovered the lining was badly in need of repair, and asked Susan to stitch it up for him.

Susan fetched her aunt's rag-bag and sat down to execute the repairs. She felt proud to be working for so great a man, for Mrs. Friend never allowed any hand but her own to attend to her husband's wardrobe. She looked out a suitable piece of stuff and cut away the worn part of the lining; and in doing so disclosed a secret pocket, the opening cunningly concealed in the usual one. But it was worn out too; there was a slit in it; and as she pulled away the lining she saw a paper that had slipped through and slidden down to the skirts of the coat. Susan had none of Mrs. Friend's acquiescence in her female incapacity to share his active life; nor, I am afraid, so fine a sense of honor as to refrain as she did from making any effort to know what Friend wished to remain dark. She had fastened with avidity on M. Sauvignac's partial disclosures, not from vulgar curiosity but from her eager desire to extend the grounds

of her admiration. And here chance had put in her way a paper containing, it might be, the most thrilling of political secrets. "Here's a paper slipped down behind the lining of your coat," she said. Friend, deep in his thoughts, did not hear. Smiling with a sense of daring and mischief, and strong in self-confidence since Will trusted her with his secrets, Susan unfolded the paper and read it.

It was short and distinct; yet she read it again and again, unable to grasp its meaning. And yet she understood it too clearly; there was no room for misunderstanding. That was the difficulty, for the thing was incredible. It ran:

"9 *Germinal*, An. XIV.

"M. le Comte de Mollien.

"Payez à M. Henri Dubois ou l'ordre vingt mille francs.

"Napoléon."

She instantly recalled Sauvignac's information that Friend was known in France by this name. There could be no other interpretation of the note than the obvious one; unless indeed there could be a second Henri Dubois. The name was a common one enough; but if so, how came a Frenchman's papers in her uncle's pocket? It could not be. The world darkened around her. Suddenly she saw the mysteries which had been so promising of pride and joy in a new aspect. Such secrecy could only be the mark of evil. It must be that her adored uncle, her "Daddy Friend," was a traitor in the pay of Napoleon.

Her wrath flared up at the realization of a long course of treachery. She did not tremble; she was not dismayed. A frenzy of indignation and revolt possessed her. She would trample him under foot; she would cast the unclean thing into the abyss. Her passion gave her strength abundant.

"You call yourself Henri Dubois in France?" she asked in a voice new to her. Startled at the tone even before the sense reached him, Friend looked up, and met such a blaze of scorn and reprobation that the sudden shock scattered his self-possession. He quailed before her.

"Infamous traitor! Take your wages!" she cried, flinging the crumpled paper at him. He pounced on it, straightened it, and cast one glance on it and on the empty grate, then thrust it into his mouth and gulped it down, furtive and shrinking under her gaze, yet glaring at her with a brazen defiance of his own shame horrible to see. Only for a moment; yet it was enough to establish the truth.

"It is true, then?" asked Susan, dominating over him. "You are afraid of me, now I have found you out? You are afraid to claim your wages?"

As she spoke he recovered self-command. He sprang up and locked the door; then he turned to her, very pale, but himself again. "My dear child, what are you thinking of?" he asked. "That bit of paper—it's better out of the way; it might compromise somebody; but it has nothing to do with me." He spoke rapidly and thickly, but his manner was coherent, persuasive, urgent.

Susan looked at him coldly. "Now I know you are lying," she said.

"Why, what do you think? What mad idea have you got into your head? Henri Dubois—was that the name? that is not I."

"That is your name in France—your name as Napoleon's spy. Oh, I know; your friend M. Sauvignac told us."

"Nonsense! You misunderstood him. It is true for a short time I borrowed the name—it was three years ago, during the peace, when I was in France on a secret errand from the Government; and Dubois and I changed

characters. He for some reason of his own wanted a disguise; I lent him my name and my overcoat: the paper was his, no doubt; I never knew he had left it there. I called myself Henri Dubois for a few days in Paris; and my French friends keep up the joke; I am always Dubois to them."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Susan. "I saw it in your face. You are a liar; I shall never believe a word you say again."

He looked at her menacingly; but she sustained his gaze undaunted. He recognized a new development in the girl he had known; her strength and spirit astonished him. He was obliged to exert himself against her, and threw all the terrors of his anger into his frown. She began to be conscious of her audacity in matching herself against such an opponent, but strung herself to stand up to him bravely.

"Well, Susan," he said presently, speaking low and threateningly, "remember at least that there are lives at stake. These are no times for playing with reputations; a word now will bring a man to the gallows. It's not my own life I'm anxious about; you can't harm me; but remember your aunt's happiness depends on me. You would kill her if you told her of your fancies. There's young North too; his life hangs on mine."

"How?" asked Susan coldly, "if, as you say, you are innocent?"

"Innocence won't do much for a man just now, Susan, if he is accused of treasonable relations with France. The nation is so agog with fright that the mere suspicion is enough to hang a man. I am all right; I have been so useful to the authorities that I can't be spared; but Will North is new and a stranger; there'd be no influence at work to save his life."

"Do you mean that if I accuse you, you will manage

to shift the guilt on to him?" said Susan. "Are you wicked enough for that?"

"Nonsense; how do you think I could manage that? It's only that he is so well known as my friend and companion that what touches me must touch him. In political affairs, Susan, reputations are like a woman's; a breath is enough to blast them. If a whisper of suspicion gets about, his prospects are at an end."

"Better for him that they should be," replied Susan, "if you have anything to do with them."

"Absurd! You talk like a child, Susan; you cannot understand. You are entirely mistaken as to the meaning of that bit of paper. I have nothing to do with Napoleon; nothing whatever. On my honor I swear it." He tried to throw a convincing air of sincerity into his words and looks, but he was conscious he was not equal to his usual standard. He was still unnerved by the shock of discovery.

"For heaven's sake, don't swear! It's of no use; I don't believe you," she said.

"Obstinate baggage! Well, believe me or not as you like, wench—one thing you shall do, and that's to hold your tongue. You little know the mischief a single rash word would make." He gripped her by the arm and stood over her, menacing, terrible. Susan's strength deserted her. She burst into tears.

"I only wish never to see you again!" she sobbed. "Let me go away. It is a disgrace to have lived in the same house with you!"

He gave a contemptuous sound, half laugh, half snort.

"It is!" she declared. "I thought that I had honest blood in my veins; and now I find I have been nourished on treason. Why did you not leave me to starve?"

"Silly, senseless child!" he said with biting scorn. "You are not a baby, Susan, to talk such folly. Can't you speak sense?"

"Look here!" cried Susan, springing to her feet. "Tell me now who I am and why you chose to adopt me. I suppose you had some bad, treacherous motive. I hope you had; I would rather you were black throughout. Who am I—who were my parents? Why did you adopt me? You *must* tell me; I have the right to know!"

Friend took a turn or two up and down the room, thinking deeply, his brow dark. "Is it true that I have no friends—that my family perished in the Revolution?" she pursued. "Was my father a friend of yours? Perhaps he was an enemy; perhaps you killed him! Is that why you adopted me?"

"No, no, child!" said Friend hastily. "Don't jump to such ridiculous conclusions. Your father was a good friend of mine; it is just as I have always told you. But I may as well tell you the rest since you want to know; though whether you will like it when you hear it is another matter."

"I am not likely to like anything you are concerned in, I fancy," said Susan. "But I choose to know; I won't be duped any longer."

"Very well, miss; you shall have the truth; though your pride will come in for a nasty blow, I expect. I believe you know all about your mother; I have told you all that I know, at least. She was a Mlle. de Marny——"

"Yes, yes, I know that. That is true, then? And my father?"

"You never had a father according to law, my dear," said Friend with a hateful smile; "he omitted to go through the form of marriage with your mother, and consequently he does not count in your parentage in the eyes of society. His relatives naturally have chosen to ignore your existence, which they do not consider very creditable to them."

Susan gazed at him with a whitening face. "This is true?" she asked. Friend turned away. "Yes, this is true," he replied hurriedly and uneasily; "now you know your story and can understand why I have kept it from you hitherto. It is not a very agreeable one, you see."

"And was my father a Frenchman?"

"No, English."

"And a friend of yours. A worthy friend!" said Susan.

"Susan, you're not to——" said Friend hastily, and stopped himself. "Well?" he began again. "Are you satisfied now, or is there anything else you want to know?"

"I want to know this," said Susan, trying to speak steadily. "Why did you adopt me? It seems I am a nameless and friendless orphan, and my existence is a crime and a disgrace. Why didn't you leave me to perish with the rest? It would have been kinder." She could not help her voice trembling at the last words.

"Oh, come, it's not so bad as that, child," said Friend consolingly. "Life is sweet; and as for birth, what does it matter? Who is there who knows or cares what your parentage was? You pass to all the world now as our daughter."

"Yes, and that is another disgrace," she said passionately. "Born in shame, and brought up in infamy,—on the wages of treachery! My life is poisoned."

"Poisoned! Rubbish! You've got a fine set of tragedy airs from your romances."

"They aren't tragedy airs!" she exclaimed. "It's serious. You can't understand, I suppose; but how am I ever to hold up my head again? I have no place among decent people. And as for passing as your daughter—if there could be anything more shameful

than such an origin, it would be to owe my life and upbringing to a man like you."

"Well, as for that, my dear," replied Friend, "you are not so much indebted to me as you might think. I've managed to make my profit out of you, you may be sure. You have relatives, you see, who were glad enough to get the scandal hushed up and have you brought up decently out of sight; and they've paid me tolerably handsomely for my trouble. So you can't say you owe your upbringing to my benevolence exactly; your gratitude needn't trouble you."

"I see," said Susan bitterly. "I begin to understand. I am glad to know it; now I can despise you as you deserve."

"With all my heart, my dear. But a small detail remains to be settled. A young lady of your sagacity must perceive that it is not to my interest that a story like this discovery of yours should get about. I want your assurance that not a word of it shall ever pass your lips."

"You want my assurance!" said Susan scornfully. "And why, pray, should I give you that?"

"I think I can extort it," he said with an ugly look. "It is not only my life that is at stake, but others which you value higher. Will North's, for instance."

"I defy you to touch him!" cried Susan, springing to her feet. "He is absolutely innocent; you cannot harm him; say what you like, I don't believe it. You cannot touch him, I say."

Friend turned and took a few steps away from her, and coming back, began again with a complete change of manner.

"You misunderstand me entirely, Susan. Let us discuss the matter sensibly; we've both of us lost our tempers over this nasty affair. I'm afraid I spoke to you rather brutally just now; but it pricks a man, Susan,

to be causelessly suspected like this. You are absolutely wrong in your suspicions about that little bit of paper. I have explained to you how it was; why, any other interpretation is ridiculous. If you understood more about affairs, child, and could know something of all I have done during the last six years, you'd understand how preposterous the notion is. I in the pay of old Boney! There's not a man of my acquaintance who could believe it."

"Oh, you are very clever," said Susan. "You have deceived us all, no doubt. You may go on doing it with others; but you can't make me believe you again."

"Perverse, obstinate girl! But what's the use of reasoning with a woman? If you were older, child, and wiser, you would see the justice of what I say. Well, I give it up. You will not be convinced, I see. I can only assure you you are wronging me deeply, Susan. Think what you will of me; I can't help it. But one caution I must give you; beware how you breathe a word to Will North on this subject. You could not harm me, even though you sent your precious discovery abroad by the town-crier; there's not a soul but would laugh at you, unless it were Will North. And it would be his ruin to quarrel with me."

"Do you hold all his future prospects in your hand, then?" said Susan scornfully.

"I can do a good deal towards either making or marring them, my dear; the lad hasn't a friend but me; and without influence, who can get on in life? Let him quarrel with me and he is done for—can never hope to rise beyond a beggarly clerkship at fifty pounds a year. He might even lose that; there's no telling."

"And better so than rise through help of yours," said Susan.

"You don't know what an avalanche a careless word might set in motion, Susan. These are no ordinary

times; men's minds are strained to the breaking-point. When once you start them on the hunt for treason, they won't stop till they've tasted blood. The lad has no friends; and his blunt honesty makes him ready to walk into any trap that's laid for him. If he quarrels with me, how can I save him? I shall be forced to vindicate my name; and he will pay the price. You don't know what affairs are. I warn you, it is a serious matter. Not a word to him, then; or, I assure you on my sacred word of honor, it will end in his death."

Susan was staggered. The vagueness of the danger made it look convincing. She did not for one moment doubt the truth of her discovery; but she did believe that Friend might have it in his power to ruin Will by way of revenge. She found herself trembling from head to foot.

"Let me go," she said very low. "I must think." She stood up and went blindly to the door. Friend watched her intently, wondering whether further pressure would serve him or would only harden her. She fumbled for the latch; the door was still locked. He laid his hand on it and turned the key for her, holding the door still closed.

"Remember, Susan," he said, low and urgently, "a single word to Will North, and you hang him." He opened the door and she escaped.

He passed his hand over his brow and heaved a deep sigh. "A cursed awkward accident," he muttered, pacing up and down the room. "A damned awkward accident!"

He began to review the position. "She has no evidence; I'm in no danger from her. But if she starts North on the trail—I can manage the boy by himself; but I can't have rumors getting about. And she'll tell him; to a certainty she'll tell him. She might talk him over if I let her get the chance; and then if he

kicked up a row the fat 'ud be in the fire at once. No; I must keep the young people separate for the present. This Kentish journey is a happy chance. And I must so tighten my hold on him that he shall take my word against hers. I think I can do it; fatherly benevolence, man-of-the-world candor, and that sort of thing. He's an impressionable lad; any one who goes the right way to work can make his mind his own. Sukey can't do that yet, for all her power over him. I shall have him all to myself down in Kent; luck's been good to me there. There's no one else she'd tell, is there? Not Polly—no, she'd never dare tell Polly. I think I'm safe from her. And then, when I've got Will on my side and the impression has worn off a bit, we may be able to persuade her that it's all a mistake. What a spirited baggage it is! She'll grow up a fine woman, will the little Susan. North will have his hands full with her."

CHAPTER XIII

THE WIFE'S STRUGGLE

FRIEND'S first care was to go down to the Admiralty Office and to suggest to Will's chief, Mr. Hunt, that they should all three dine at a coffee-house and spend the evening at the play by way of celebration of the Kentish journey; a piece of conviviality which had as its real motive the prevention of a farewell interview between Will and Susan. The invitation which would have looked inconsiderate and almost suspicious from himself, became an honor that could not be refused even if unwelcome, from the chief of the department. This arranged, he hastened to the Running Horse Inn at Southwark to tell M. Sauvignac to make ready for the journey.

But Susan had no such activities to distract her mind. She shut herself into her bedroom to brood over the changed aspect of her world, to realize the horror of the position. What weighed on her most heavily was the shame reflected on herself, and especially the facts she had learnt of her birth. She was particularly sensitive about matters of birth and family, having perhaps inherited such susceptibilities, and certainly having imbibed some from her aunt. With the one shock of seeing Friend turn before her face from an upright and benevolent protector into a treacherous villain, her love of him dropped dead. She tore him from her heart and dismissed him without a pang, without a regret; scorn

and indignation swallowed up even hate. But that she herself, instead of being the last survivor of a noble and honored, though ruined family, the innocent and stainless victim of misfortune, friendless, but on that very account the object of universal sympathy and pity, must own herself instead an abhorred and shocking thing, whose very existence was a crime—this was the blow she could not bring herself to endure.

She would not go down to lunch; and Mrs. Friend came to see if she were ill, and to urge her to eat. Susan was most unwilling to confess her trouble, but she had to acknowledge she had one. It was impossible to tell her aunt anything of her discovery of the note from Napoleon; and when Mrs. Friend insisted with entreaties and all manner of persuasions on hearing what was the matter, she kept back that part of the story, and told her what she had learnt about her birth.

Mrs. Friend was even more shocked than Susan had been; and not only because her views on such subjects were of the strictest. There was more to shock her than the mere fact of illegitimate birth. She could not say so to Susan; but she did not believe the story. Never a word of such a stain had her husband breathed to her; and she could conceive no motive he could have had for misleading her on the subject. He knew well that, however the facts might pain her, they would only incline her the more warmly to the helpless child who had suffered such a misfortune. She felt too from Susan's manner that there had been something strange and even unnatural in the way her husband had told the tale. The child was evidently possessed with resentment and indignation; the shock had not been broken to her; and Mrs. Friend felt confident that of all men in the world, he under ordinary circumstances would have been the one to show the utmost delicacy, the greatest tenderness, in making such a revelation. He

was capable of telling such a story in a rough unfeeling manner only if angered and using it as a weapon for revenge, or if repeating a concocted tale for the furtherance of some underhand scheme. She determined to wait till he came in and speak to him on the subject; but he was late, and fearful of annoying him, for he could not bear her to shorten her night's rest on his account, she went to bed, but remained awake and eagerly listening for his return. At last he came in.

"What, awake, Polly?" he said, when he saw her sitting up in bed.

"Yes, dearest; I have been waiting for you. I have something that I must ask you; I could not go to sleep till I had seen you."

"It should be something important to keep you awake at this hour of the night, little woman. It is past twelve. Well, what is it?"

"My love," she said timidly, "I want you to be so good as to tell me the whole story of Susan's parentage, and why you adopted her."

He looked at her sharply. "Why, Polly? What's she been saying?"

"I found the child in sad trouble this morning, my love. She has been shut up in her room all day, weeping and grieving. And the cause is, something she has heard from you about her birth."

"What did she tell you?" said Friend quickly.

"That you had told her she is the illegitimate child of an English father and a French mother."

"And was that all?"

"Those were all the facts; the rest was only about her existence being a disgrace to her relations."

"Well, that's all there is, my love. I'm sorry I had to tell the child, and sorry she is so grieved about it; but I can't help it. She asked me herself to tell her.

Those are the facts; and I suppose she had to know them some time or other."

"But, my dearest life——" began Mrs. Friend.

"Well, Polly?"

"I can't understand it. I want you to explain it to me. Who, then, was her father? You have always told me he was a friend of yours. And why did you adopt her?"

"Look here, Polly," said Friend, his brow darkening; "I'd rather you asked no more questions. You know I have chosen to keep silence about Susan's family. Let that be enough for you; I have good reasons, you may be sure."

"My dearest, I must ask. It is for the child's sake. She sits grieving, and how can I comfort her? I cannot sit still and do nothing when my child is in trouble. Tell me all; you know you can trust me; and I have a right to know."

"But I have told you; for goodness' sake what more does the woman want?"

"Dearest, the story is not complete as it stands. I can't believe it. You never breathed a word of this to me when you first brought Susan home. You told me she was the child of your friends; you spoke of her mother with respect."

"I didn't want you to know, of course, Polly, because I knew how you felt about these things. I was afraid you'd take a dislike to the child." But he overdid it; she interrupted indignantly. "No, you did not. You knew me better than that. If this story had been true you would have told me then. It is not true; you are lying to me. Friend, tell me the truth." Then suddenly she changed her tone. "Husband, you must tell me. You owe it to me. The child lies there weeping, and I cannot comfort her. I must know all the truth. Don't put me off with lies. Would you have me utterly

despise you? When have I been false to you? Friend, it is unworthy of you; it is unworthy of our love. As you value my respect, husband—as you value our marriage, you must tell me the truth now.”

He seated himself on the bedside and took her hands, looking down into the reproach and trouble of her eyes.

“I will never lie to you again, Polly, as I’m a living man,” he said. There was a pause. “What is it that you want to know?”

“The whole truth about Susan. Who she is; who were her parents—and about her birth; why you adopted her.”

He was silent again, still holding her hands in his.

“Polly,” he said at last, “I will tell you all if you want to know; but do you think you’re wise in asking? I warn you you won’t like it. You know, my love, I’m mixed up in many queer doings, not the sort of things for your ears; and if I’ve been silent and told you lies now and then, and really, when I come to think of it, I haven’t told you very many), it’s been as much to spare you pain as for my own convenience. Can’t you be content, dear, to go on so? To know that though I’m not what you’d like me to be in the world and public affairs, yet you’ve got a husband who’s as good to you as he knows how to be, and who loves you with all his soul?”

She paused a moment. “No, dear,” she replied. “I have lived on those terms for so many years; I can live so no longer. Oh, don’t think, my dearest, that I have not seen and known! I knew from the first—from the first months we were married, that you were not good—not honest. You could not hide it from me. But now it concerns my child; I must know all the truth, however it hurts me. Even if it should divide me from you—you dearer than my own soul—I must hear.”

"Well, Polly," he said with a sigh. "By the way, this will shock you. Susan is the daughter of Mr. Armour, Lord Mountstephen's only son, who went to France and perished in the Revolution."

"Good heavens!" cried Mrs. Friend. "Then that man at Brighton—was he—was he related to her?"

"Yes; he is her half-brother."

"Good heavens!" she cried again, overwhelmed. "How horrible!"

"Well, you know, Polly, there was no harm done."

"Harm! The mere thought—— It is unutterable!"

"Come, dear, you needn't take on so. No harm came of it. Neither of them knew; he couldn't have a suspicion. He meant no harm."

"No harm! O Friend!"

"Well, I mean, no more harm than that sort of beast always means. He wouldn't call it harm. He's a low brute, to be sure; but they're all like that; he's no worse than the rest. He was shocked enough when I let him into the secret."

"Then that was why he apologized so abjectly?"

"That was why."

"And Susan—oh, poor Susan! Does she know?"

"Not that bit. I did not tell her who her father was; and she never asked."

"Poor child, poor child! O Friend, this is terrible!"

"Well, dear, I wish there was nothing to tell that would pain you more. I knew you'd dislike it; still really, you know, there's no harm done. There's no sense in grieving for a might-have-been."

"Don't, don't!" she cried, warding off the thought with her hand. "Well, what else is there?"

"I suppose you want to hear how she was born, and how I came to take her."

"Yes, please. Is there any more disgrace there?"

"Not in her birth, at any rate. You may make your

mind easy there. Her father was lawfully enough married to her mother, who was a young friend and protégée of Madame Roland's, Citoyenne Suzanne Marny. Her father—young Armour, you know—was bitten with Revolutionary ideas; he'd been in France early in the eighties, and was an ardent Rousseauite and a follower of your friends Tom Paine and Godwin. Well, his father, old Lord Mountstephen, was alarmed when he saw what opinions he was forming, and sent for him home; married him to a suitable heiress of sound views, a Miss Scrimgeour, of which marriage young Evelyn is the issue—and hoped, I suppose, he'd got him tight. But it wasn't a happy marriage; the wife was a regular shrew; she had a tongue like a gadfly, and took particular delight in saying venomous things about his philosophical friends. He couldn't stand it; he bolted at last and went back to France. She died fortunately in the nick of time, and he married Susan's mother. I suppose he'd have done it sooner if he could; but he was an honorable fellow; you needn't fear any ante-matrimonial connection you'd object to. There was nothing of that sort about him; deserting his wife was the worst thing he ever did; and that he was fairly driven to. He never told his father of his second marriage; all intercourse was broken off; the old man solemnly cursed him and forbade all mention of him from the time he ran away. Well, Susan was born. But he'd thrown himself heart and soul into the Revolution; he had no sort of prudence, and heads were flying in all directions just then. He'd identified himself with the Girondists, and when they fell he perished too."

"Well? And what led you to take Susan?"

"Why, my dear, this is the part you won't like. Of course she was my friend's orphan and all that; I'd promised the poor fellow to do what I could for his wife and child, and I arranged their escape and got them safely

away; only the poor thing died on the passage. We had a terrible crossing that night, and she was worn out with all she had been through. Well, there was the little Susan without a friend in the world; and it struck me I could make a good thing out of her. Lord Mountstephen was devoted to his grandson; he'd determined to make no mistake with his bringing up; at last he'd have an heir who should do him credit and hand down his name with luster. Also he'd believe anything against his unfortunate son. So I wrote and told him about Susan, about the French marriage and all; only—a look of irrepressible delight and cunning twinkled in his eye—"according to my version, the marriage took place seven years earlier, during the first visit to France and before the marriage to Miss Scrimgeour.

"So you see," he resumed, "the poor old gentleman thought his beloved heir was supplanted, and that by what he hated most on earth, the offspring of a French revolutionist. He made inquiries, of course; but I'd got my tale straight enough and brought a respectable witness. And the Revolution had swept all traces away. No one could disprove my witness's evidence but myself, who knew the real truth. When he found he couldn't get over the facts, all he thought of was hushing them up. He agreed to make me a handsome allowance yearly for Susan's keep, and paid me a good round sum down for agreeing to suppress my evidence of the marriage and to call her illegitimate. You see it's all in the bargain to tell her she's a natural child; if I told her anything I had to tell her that. Oh, I've done well through Susan, without reckoning on what her marriage might have brought me."

"And her marriage?" gasped Mrs. Friend. "That fortune you would have given her—the twenty thousand pounds?"

"Screwed it out of old Mountstephen, of course,"

chuckled Friend. "At least, a matter of near ten thousand I have put by for her, made up of what the old sinner gave me and what I've saved and added to it; it's been rolling up at compound interest. I've always intended it for Susan if I could see my way to helping myself with a good match for her. But Raby's was such a very good match that I meant to do things handsomely; so I should have put the screws on old Mountstephen to the tune of another ten thousand. I don't think it would have been any use to ask for more; it would have needed pretty good management to get that; for he would have no wish to see his granddaughter Countess of Sandown. He wanted her kept quiet in the background. Well, it's a lucky thing for him the matter fell through."

"Good God! Then all this time you have been receiving large sums of money from Lord Mountstephen for entering into a conspiracy to keep Susan out of her rights?"

"Not her real rights, you know; she has none, for she's the child of the second marriage and quite unprovided for; but what he thinks her rights. He believes that his son was already married at the time of his supposed marriage with Miss Scrimgeour and that his beloved Evelyn is consequently a bastard."

"Oh, hush, hush! Don't say any more! What a wretch he must think you!"

"Oh, his ill opinion don't weigh upon me," said Friend cheerfully. "I'm pretty well quits with him there. The old sinner!"

"Good God!" she exclaimed. "And you have actually done this?"

He was smitten with compunction. "I knew you wouldn't like it, Polly," he said ruefully. "I wanted to keep it from you; but you would have it."

"Keep it from me—yes, with more lies. Oh, better

far know all; better know the worst. Christ! And you are just the same; you are the man I love!"

She stared at him wildly for a few seconds, and then threw herself down in bed and drew the clothes over her head. She did not reproach him. Long ago when they were first married she used to reproach him, to try to waken some sense of shame; but she only irritated him without producing any good effect. She realized at last she was imperiling their love, and losing the little chance of influence that remained. She resigned herself to believing that she was absolutely powerless over him. Only when on what she believed to be her death-bed had she hoped she might acquire a new hold. But that hope too was in vain. His soul was dead; it was not to be stirred by any emotion born of earth.

It was dreadful to remain in bed, warm and softly covered, with such pangs tearing her soul. It was dreadful that he should lie beside her like a lover, not stirring lest he should disturb her, ready with his love, his care, if she should want anything; with his tireless strength, his perfect unselfishness at her disposal for her slightest wish. If he would only have ill-treated her—have been brutal to her! Had she been alone she would have thrown herself on the floor and beaten her head on the boards, grasping greedily at cold and pain to blunt the force of her inner anguish. But if she were to show the least sign of distress he would be upon her with his terrible kindness, his unendurable solicitude. So she lay still and silent, winding the bedclothes tightly over her face and forcing them into her mouth to clench her teeth on them and keep in the passion that struggled in her throat. "Oh, base, base, base!" she was crying inwardly. "Unprincipled; sordid; base of soul! Is there any depth of shame too low for him?"

It was not the shock of novelty to her. It is impossible to live with a man in loving intimacy for year

after year, however uncommunicative he may be, without becoming aware of the set of his mind, the outlines of his character, his attitude to things of lasting import. She had long ago discovered him to be destitute of conscience, destitute of religion, barren of ideals, incapable of honor.

“And yet”—the words rose to her tongue and she choked them with the sheet—“base as he is, the most generous, the most lovable of men!”

He lay beside her without a sound. She knew he was awake, for she could always tell by his deep, regular breathing when he slept. He was listening for her, waiting for some sign of grief that he could comfort. She would let none escape her; comfort could not come from him.

“Dear Christ!” she cried in her heart, “look on him, save him, though it be through any agony of mine. Take my life if only his heart may be touched; Thou knowest it would be bliss to die for him! I offer myself for him; take my life, torture me, crucify me; but save my husband!”

CHAPTER XIV

THE WEAKNESS OF WILLIAM NORTH

FRIEND was up betimes in the morning, took a silent leave of his wife in a warm embrace to which she sadly submitted, breakfasted alone, and was off to meet Will at the Admiralty Office at nine o'clock.

Then they rode on towards Southwark, where they picked up M. Sauvignac at the Running Horse Inn. Friend explained to Will that he was to travel under the name of Mr. David Morgan from Carnarvon, in order that his slight foreign accent might pass unremarked; trusting that, little as people moved from their homes, they were not likely to run across any one well acquainted with the English of a Welshman.

Will rode in the highest spirits, which were augmented by Friend's genial tone towards him. He was conscious of an uplifting of his whole being since his interview with Susan; he glowed with moral exhilaration as if he had been subjected to a sort of spiritual cold bath. The day was fair; larks sang overhead; haymakers were at work in the fields; the air was full of fragrance; and scents, sights, and sounds were all to him so filled with the thought of Susan that they seemed to chant her name aloud, and it was with difficulty that he kept himself from joining in the song. Friend entered into his feelings with the warmest sympathy. He made allusions, veiled on account of their companion's presence but which Will well understood, to Susan and to the

time when she should be his wife. He seemed to take for granted that that ineffable happiness was close at hand. His manner made Will feel that he had adopted him into the inmost circle of his affections. He displayed an absolute interest in his feelings, a kind of eagerness for his confidence; there was something approaching deference about his sympathy immensely flattering to Will, who told himself it was all for Susan's sake, and perceived that she must be better beloved, a more important figure to her guardian than he had realized. And yet there was not a word or a tone out of character; nothing obsequious or overstrained; nothing that came unnaturally from an older and experienced man to a young one.

But M. Sauvignac was not the man to ride in silence; and though for the first hour Will's flow of talk and Friend's encouragement of it gave him scant opportunity to join in a conversation of which the inspiration was a circumstance unknown to him, he put in remarks wherever he could and little by little turned it into more general channels. It was evident that, whatever might be the precise situation which shaped his companions' talk, love and the other sex were concerned in it; and these were subjects he regarded as peculiarly his own. Loquacious by nature, he must talk, and on no topic with such eagerness and pleasure as on this. He brought in apposite anecdotes; he launched into praises of lovely woman; he grew poetic, dithyrambic, in celebration of her charms. Gradually he absorbed the principal share of the conversation.

They stopped at Orpington to dine and rest their horses; and Mr. Morgan, overflowing with good spirits, began to pay a spirited court to the landlady, a buxom widow of forty. He overwhelmed her with his compliments, declared himself forever her slave, and swore he could not live without her; while she laughed and

called him an impudent rascal, and declared he wanted some one to box his ears for him. Mr. Morgan thereon entreated her to do him that favor herself; but she was obdurate and retreated to her private corner behind the bar, whither he had not the temerity to follow. Will could not help laughing and applauding his siege, and encouraging him to pursue her. Friend looked on in silence with a sort of indulgent scorn.

They took horse again after dinner and rode on towards Seven Oaks, where they intended to pass the night. The stream of Mr. Morgan's loquacity was by no means checked; he talked on as gaily as ever, but his conversation now turned from the general to the particular. He became autobiographical, and narrated his conquests and adventures among the fair sex with irresistible broad humor and gusto: and though the matter of his tales was free even to license, he avoided actual grossness in the manner of telling them. Will, at least, who had suffered from a wide experience of foul talk, was not offended. Many of the adventures threw him into ecstasies of laughter; and, delighted by his wit and vivacity, he encouraged him to proceed. Friend listened with a grim scornful smile, but said nothing; and in the best of spirits the travelers drew up at the Crown Inn at Seven Oaks.

It was the very model of an English inn. A jolly stout red-faced host led the way into a cool wainscoted parlor, where the dark oak gleamed with much polishing, and a great jug of honeysuckle stood in the empty grate. Friend and Mr. Morgan threw themselves, one into a cushioned armchair, the other on the high-backed oaken settle by the fireplace, while Will seated himself near the open window and enjoyed the scent of the roses which climbed around it. The prettiest possible serving-maid, with tight trim waist and short skirts showing her neat ankles, shook out a snowy cloth and

began laying the table for supper, shedding knives and forks into their places with marvelous dexterity, and tripping in and out of the room with a gait as dainty as a water-wagtail's. Mr. Morgan's attention was aroused. "Let me help you, my dear!" he exclaimed, jumping up and forgetting his weariness. "So fair a pair of hands were never meant to work while we sit idle."

The maid demurely refused his assistance, but he would not be denied. Showering his compliments upon her, he seized a pile of platters and began setting them on the table at random. Will laughed at his clumsy efforts; the maid discreetly sniggered as she left the room for further supplies. Mr. Morgan sank again into his armchair. "What grace she has, that girl!" he sighed. "How she trips across the room! Did you ever see such feet and ankles? Ah, your English inns; what women they boast!"

"She will drive the landlady of the Bear at Orpington out of your head," said Will.

"Out of my head perhaps, but not from my heart: my heart is large enough to contain all—all," said Mr. Morgan; "all the charming, provoking, enchanting sex! Ah, here she comes, the little witch. My angel, suffer me to relieve you of that tray; it is too heavy for your delicate arms." He sprang forward to take the tray from her, but grasping it awkwardly, it fell to the ground. Bread, butter, cheese, a round of beef, and plates and dishes in fragments rolled on the floor. Will, roaring with laughter, hastened to the rescue. The pretty maid was quite cross. "It's all your fault for interfering," she said pettishly to Mr. Morgan. "Gentlemen ought to know their place and not meddle till they're wanted. This gentleman now has more sense," pointing to Will; "he can lend a hand when it's needed; but he wouldn't put a poor girl out with his silly talk and go dropping things about the floor."

“Not he,” said Will gallantly, “and yet he knows a pretty girl when he sees one just as well.”

Mr. Morgan's contrition was overwhelming. Between them they picked up the eatables and set the table, Will now joining in the task and setting himself to soothe the injured feelings of the maid, who was not to be appeased by his companion's gallantries. To Will's attempts at consolation, however, she lent a favorable ear. Sauvignac was, or pretended to be, piqued at her preference; and Will out of gaiety and mischief rose to the situation and carried on a lively flirtation which lasted throughout the meal. When they had finished, and the wine was placed upon the table, their waitress withdrew and the host came in to inquire after their comfort and to be asked to take a glass with them; but he found his company very poor performers at the bottle, and had to resign himself to letting them rise from the table sober. Friend was unusually abstemious; Will had already remarked that not only had he never seen him drunk, but he had never known him to take more than a couple of glasses at a sitting. Mr. Morgan was naturally free from the national vice of Englishmen; and Will himself, though not averse to a social glass, was at his age in no way bound to it.

It was still early. Friend had lighted a pipe and was lying back in an easy-chair, his legs stretched across another, enjoying the fragrant wreaths of smoke as he slowly emitted them from his lips. Tobacco was his sole and rare indulgence, reserved for occasions like the present. He never smoked at home; the least whiff of tobacco upset his wife. Nor did Will share his enjoyment of it at this moment. The scent of hayfields and of roses came in at the window and called him with a stronger attraction; the light still lingered in the western sky. He went out and paced the quiet village street. It was silent and deserted; the young moon hung sharp

as a sickle in the sky. Will's brain, kindled and glowing with thoughts of Susan, revolted from the idea of sleep. He felt himself encircled by a glowing cloud, an illusive promise of happiness that glorified even while it mocked him. His kingdom lay before him, a joy greater than dreams could hold out; the very air about him quickened with promise. "Susan! Susan!" sang his heart; and the thought of her seemed to whirl him from the earth in fiery gusts. He returned to the inn. The jolly red-faced host was locking the stable door; in the house his companions were leaving the parlor to go to bed. The pretty maid came with candles to light them upstairs; Mr. Morgan followed her; Friend lingered to give the landlord directions about breakfast in the morning, and a loose nail in one of the horses' shoes. Overcoming his reluctance, for there was clearly no use in sitting up, Will went upstairs. The maid was still detained in the room assigned to Friend and Mr. Morgan. He was asking for a warming-pan, a request she appeared to think unreasonable in the middle of July. Anyhow, Will heard a good deal of laughter and remonstrance and the words, "Go along with you!" and "Have done with your impudence!" and their not unnatural sequence, the sound of a romping scuffle. But it seemed unduly prolonged, and ended unexpectedly in a terrified scream, and the girl rushing headlong into the room where Will was waiting, hotly pursued by Mr. Morgan,, whom he only baffled by slamming the door in his face.

"What's the matter? Has the gentleman been rude to you?" he inquired, as the maid burst into loud sobs. "There, don't cry, my dear; there's no harm done." He drew near her to console her.

"He's taken my locket; he snatched away my locket; nasty, violent wretch!" she sobbed out. Her cap and the handkerchief that covered her bosom showed considerable disarray.

"Well, never mind, my dear; I'll get it back for you. I'll make him give it up. Come, don't cry; put your kerchief straight," said Will. She was apparently sobbing too violently to obey him, and he tried to do it himself. "My locket!" she cried, looking up at him appealingly. "It had my mother's portrait in it; my father had it took only a month afore she died; and he will be so angry if I've lost it!" She was in great distress.

"You shan't lose it; I'll make him give it back. Never you fret, my dear," said Will consolingly. He had to bend over her and speak kindly; his arm stole round her; whether she invited him or not he did not quite know, but it seemed inevitable that he should end his comfortings with a kiss. And the kiss had more effect in cheering her than even his promise to recover the locket; her head rested confidently on his shoulder and her face turned to his. His other arm suddenly clasped her; he forgot that his task was only one of comfort.

Friend had come upstairs a moment before. "What's that noise I heard? Where's North?" he asked Sauvignac.

"Noise, my friend? What noise did you hear?"

"The girl cried out. You've been playing some of your pranks, Sauvignac."

"And what harm, my dear fellow? Is it forbidden to play pranks with a pretty rogue like that charming girl?"

"Yes, it is, when the game makes her scream."

"Oh, it was not the game she screamed at; I was the wrong playfellow, it appears. She has got hold of the right one now, and you see she does not scream."

Friend strode to Will's room and called him, laying his hand on the latch. Will sprang to the door and shot the bolt. "Oh, goodness!" cried the girl, taking fright. "Whatever are you agoing to do, sir?" She

hastily smoothed her hair and twitched her kerchief straight, and darted out of the room by a second door. Friend knocked authoritatively. Will in a fury muttered an oath and hesitated; but the girl was gone. He reluctantly drew the bolt back and let Friend in. He looked keenly round the room and then bent his eye on Will.

"What's this, North?" he said. "What have you to do with Mr. Morgan's gallantries? And why did you fasten your door?"

"The girl screamed," stammered Will sulkily and a good deal confused. "She ran in here to escape from your friend; and I bolted the door to protect her."

"Oh; you bolted your door in my face to protect her, did you? I think she found that open one a better protection. Look here, North, I have thought well of you; but if I see you running after every petticoat that comes in your way, I shall retract my good opinion."

"Running after a petticoat? What d'ye mean?" exclaimed Will. "I had to soothe the girl; she was in a sad taking because your friend Mr. Morgan had snatched a locket or some such trinket from her neck; all I did was to try and comfort her. I never asked her to come in here."

"That may be; but I don't see why you must bolt the door while you comfort her. You carried your consolations too far."

"Well, and if a kiss or so did pass, is that any such mighty matter?"

"It depends upon circumstances, North. Must I remind you that your kisses are bespoken? Every one you give to another woman is stolen from Susan. I am jealous for my girl, North; I will give her to no light-o'-love."

"I am no light-o'-love!" exclaimed Will, his conscience pricking him sharply. "I swear to you, Mr.

Friend, I love Susan with every thought of my soul and every drop of blood in my body. No other woman can ever be anything to me, any idle trifling you may have caught me in notwithstanding. That girl is nothing to me; absolutely nothing. If you doubt my love to my divine Susan because of the nonsense of a minute, you wrong me—on my soul you wrong me.”

“You have got to learn, my boy, to restrain yourself from the nonsense of a minute and idle trifling. I don’t doubt you love Susan after your fashion; but when I see a man pledging himself to one woman one day and trifling with a chambermaid the next, I call him a light-o’-love, and I think it’s a mild term. That’s not the sort of affection worthy of my girl. Pray how would you have liked her to have seen you just now?”

Will was silent.

“You have been a little carried off your feet, my lad, with Sauvignac’s frothy talk. You must be on your guard against him; he’s a good fellow, but that’s his weak side. Frenchmen are often like that; they think it due to their character to appear men of gallantry. The best of them do it. When an Englishman talks bawdy you know he’s a bad egg; but it’s not the same across the Channel.”

“But Mr. Morgan did not talk—he did not say a single indecent word,” said Will.

“No; it might have been better if he had. You’d not have listened to him then. It’s all the same thing, Will. If you want to make yourself worthy of a good woman, you must resist the beginnings of mischief. It’s no use thinking you can pull yourself up half-way.”

Will made no reply. Friend bade him good-night and left him. Will heard the door of the next room open and close, and a murmur of voices began to sound through the wall and continued far into the night. Will imagined Mr. Morgan to be receiving his share of the

lecture; but before he dropped asleep concluded they could not have so much to say on that topic. As it happened he was entirely wrong; it was a very different matter that occupied them.

To his credit be it said that his admiration of Friend was increased by his rebuke. At the first attack indeed he made light of the incident, and protested to himself as well as to Friend there was no reason for his interference; but he had the candor presently to acknowledge that the intervention was timely. He wondered at Friend's strictness of view. His life had hitherto brought him against no such men. He did not drink; he did not swear; North had never yet heard a blasphemous or even a free expression from his mouth, a singularity in that age which could not fail to strike him. And yet his strength and courage were as conspicuous as those of any hero of the prize-ring; in energy, daring, power, all the masculine virtues as he understood them, he rivaled the best of his old associates. Will was an impressionable youngster, remarkably open to good influences and prone to hero-worship: and the new illustration of Friend's character, strange to his old standards though it was, brought a glow to his thoughts of him which had been lacking. Forthwith he elevated him into the position of an example, and vowed if strength were lent him, to form himself on so excellent a pattern. Alas, poor Will!

Meanwhile the chosen model was conversing with Sauvignac in the French tongue. "You must get me a glance at the papers carried by your guileless young friend, *mon cher*," said Sauvignac.

"Certainly, monsieur; it can no doubt be managed before long," replied Friend. "We only wait a good opportunity."

"But what opportunity can be better than this? Here we have every possible condition."

"How? Here? To-night?"

"I thought you were arranging it just now; why did you not? Surely the thing is simple enough. Now we must wait here another night, I suppose, and try to-morrow."

"Do you mean that he should have been my bedfellow instead of you? I wanted to talk over our plans with you; and it is risky work ferreting about among a sleeping man's things."

"That it certainly is unless you are prepared to silence him in case he wakes; I did not mean that. No, we must get him to leave us his wallet unwatched. Surely you see what I would do."

"No; what?"

"Why, decoy him away from his room; get him to leave his wallet behind, thinking all secure and all the house asleep but himself. The thing is perfectly simple; Providence itself has provided the bait we want. You must understand me! You are no simpleton, *mon ami* Dubois. Why, then—find out where that pretty chambermaid sleeps, and let him know."

Friend looked at him with a stare of freezing coldness, and said shortly. "Think of another plan, m'sieur."

"Nay, it is your part to think of plans, *mon cher*. You are the man of intellect, of resource; what am I compared to you? You do not like my plan; well then, suggest another."

"It is hot weather," said Friend. "We can halt for our lunch and a rest by some brook or pool. Then you can propose a dip to him; and I will mind his wallet for him while he is in the water."

"Ah, you will mind his wallet very well!" laughed Sauvignac. "That might do, if only we are sure to pass a brook or pool. But your plan is not so neat, so sure to escape suspicion as mine, I must insist, my friend."

"Your plan won't do, and there's an end of it," said Friend. "We can go by Tildesden and pass Poleshanger wood and pool. We must start early, or it'll be too near dinner time to make a halt seem natural. It'll all be perfectly simple; and you can take a copy of the letters at your leisure. Better put the originals back when you're done with them; if we alarm him we shall lose him for future use."

"Yes, we will not alarm our milch cow. Good beast! He little guesses the service he is doing to our Cause," he sniggered. "You do well to be kind to so valuable an animal, *mon ami*. You treat him as a father—as if he were a precious only son, the very apple of your eye. I was half angry when I saw you make so much of him this morning. I did not comprehend the fineness of your game. Ah, you are a man, *mon vieux*! Would I had half your brains!"

"One must be careful of one's tools," replied Friend. "And now, m'sieur, for the next step. My young friend expects to find Pitt at Folkestone. We will accompany him as far as Hythe, where I'll ship you off in my little trading cutter, the *All's Well*. I should rarely like to take you to Folkestone and despatch you under the very nose of Pitt; but I don't know the men there. Hythe's the safer game. And I have another reason; I want to show you on the way the scene of our little arrangement. We will stop at Aldington, a village a few miles from Hythe, where I have good friends, and where you can survey the ground and report accordingly to the Emperor."

"Good, *mon cher*. And what am I to report?"

"He knows the scheme already. It's like this." And Friend briefly outlined his plot. For some years he had been intimately connected with the smugglers and smuggling trade in the district of the Kentish marshes, having made their acquaintance for the sake of the facilities

they afforded for secret journeyings to the Continent. He masked his real object by becoming a sharer in the traffic, and was joint partner with two of the most noted smugglers of the neighborhood in the ownership of a cutter, the *All's Well* of Hythe. Under the nickname of "Squire Wood" he was well known to all the principal traders in contraband of that coast, lawless and desperate characters, who were famous for their daring and defiance of the Revenue officers. The conflicts between them and the authorities had been many and sanguinary; not infrequently several hundred men engaged; and it was Friend's intention to organize a fight on so large a scale that the military should be called in to quell the disturbance, and while the troops were thus engaged, to give a signal to Napoleon that he might land unopposed. There was no difficulty in finding the necessary numbers; all he had to do was to arrange for a cargo of special value to be landed on a given night and to pass word for a party of unusual strength to be ready to carry it inland, while providing at the same time that the Revenue officers should hear of it. A hint to them of the importance of the occasion, a muster on the Marsh of all the inflammable elements, and the thing was done. He knew he could trust the determination and ferocity of the smugglers to ensure a desperate and a bloody battle.

Sauvignac expressed his approbation and had many questions to put of time and place and other details. It was late before their talk ceased—that talk which poor Will North attributed to so different a subject.

CHAPTER XV

THE BETRAYED MESSENGER

IF the maid of the inn really relied on Will to recover her locket she must have been disappointed in him; for by the morning he was too much ashamed of his conduct to recur to the subject; and M. Sauvignac was left in undisputed possession of the trophy. That gentleman's cheerfulness was quite unclouded by what had passed. He joked Will about his good fortune with persistent humor, till at last perceiving that the topic was an unwelcome one he showed a disposition to return to the amatory histories of the previous day. But Will turned a deaf ear; and presently Mr. Morgan took the hint, and recognizing that his companions' mood had altered, he changed the tune of his discourse. He certainly was a man of tact. The obnoxious subject was completely dropped, and not the slightest sign betrayed consciousness of his hearers' change of attitude. Friend showed his appreciation by joining in the conversation; and it was a very jovial, united trio who pulled up their horses for a noonday rest in Poleshanger wood on the brink of the old mill-pool. It was Will himself who provided the opportunity for his betrayal. "How refreshing a plunge in that pond would be," he said, leaning over the mossy wall and throwing crumbling bits of mortar and moss into the still water that mirrored every bough and leaf of the trees above it. Sauvignac turned to wink and grimace delightedly at Friend. "Why not, my

boy?" he replied. "We've time enough. I'll mind your things." Sauvignac could scarce repress a guffaw, and abruptly stooped to unfasten his boots to hide it. Friend shot a warning scowl at him behind Will's back and continued calmly. "You swim, Morgan? You'll have a dip with the young un?"

So the unconscious victim delivered his trust to his betrayer, and plunged into the water. It was easy for Friend to abstract the packet from his pouch unseen.

After half-an-hour's halt they rode on. They passed Ashford in the afternoon; and Friend easily persuaded Will to accompany him to the village of Aldington, which he declared to be quite in the road to Folkestone. It was nearly six o'clock before they came in sight of the tower of Aldington church. Copperhurst, the farm whither Friend was bound, lay a little further to the east, a good mile from the main body of the village. It was a fine old place, built of venerable red brick, mellowed and lichened into beauty by centuries of weather, and flanked with fragments of ancient wall and buttress whose massiveness showed very great antiquity. Two tall, slender chimney-stacks rose above the high-pitched roof. Friend led the way through the stackyard where a family of pigs was routing in the straw, to the back of the house, and rapped at the open door with his whip-handle. A girl came out of the kitchen. She had a complexion of new milk and roses, limpid blue eyes and stiff, crinkly hair like golden wires. Her serious face softened into a smile at the sight of Friend. A knot of fair-haired children peered through the currant-bushes of the garden at the visitors.

"Well, Dolly, my dear, how do you all at Copperhurst?" cried Friend. "Fairly, I hope? How's your mother? Ask her if she can come and speak to me; I've two friends here I want to beg her hospitality for."

The girl disappeared without a word. "Ah, I like

these quarters; you have good taste, my friend," murmured Sauvignac. Friend shot a glance at him. "Mind, Morgan, no pranks here," he said in a low voice. "You are on your honor."

Sauvignac pulled a grimace. In a minute the farmer's wife came bustling up, a pleasant-faced woman of forty.

"Ah, Mrs. Rayner, and how are you? How's all the family?" called out Friend in his great hearty voice.

"La, Squire, and it's you yourself! Well, the sight of you is good for sore eyes, as they say. Get ye down and come in; bring your friends in; don't hang back; ye're kindly welcome all of ye. Any friends of Squire Wood's is welcome at Copperhurst."

"Ah, a word to you, Will—a word, Morgan," whispered Friend. "Don't forget my name here is Wood—Squire Harry Wood—my London name's not known in these parts." He winked at Will, who accepted the statement with some surprise.

Mrs. Rayner led the way into a spacious kitchen with a high roof supported by huge oaken beams. An enormous hearth and great open chimney was on one side; a long table stood on the other side of the door, where Dolly and a servant-girl were laying the cloth for supper. A tall, powerful young man in riding breeches and gaiters was lounging in front of the fire, slashing sulkily at his boots with his riding-whip, and following the movements of the farmer's daughter with intent and moody eyes; while her steadily averted head and demure, conscious carriage showed at once her recognition of his gaze and her repudiation of it.

"You know Mr. Jack Rangsley, Squire?" said Mrs. Rayner, introducing him. "To be sure I do," replied Friend, advancing with outstretched hand. "Why, we've been partners these last three years, dame! I know Jack Rangsley? Who is there on all the Marsh who doesn't?"

The young man turned and grasped Friend's hand. "Glad to see you again, Wood," he said, some echo of sullenness, clearly not due to the newcomers, still hanging round his manner. Friend made haste to present his companions. "Here's a friend of mine from Wales, dame—Mr. David Morgan, whom I'm anxious to bespeak your kindness for. He happens to be in a little difficulty; in trouble, you know, from the Bow Street fellows—you understand—and has to keep quiet a bit; so where could I bring him safer than here? I'm going to try to ship him out of the country presently, but I must look round a bit first and see that the coast is clear; there's such a deuced sight of the military about just now that we have to look about us at every step. Isn't that so, Rangley?"

"By G— it is, Wood. Trade's as good as ruined."

"And this," indicating Will, "is a young friend of mine who has come with us—for the good of his health," he concluded with a knowing look. "Can you take us in for a night or two, dame?"

"That I can, Squire, and glad to do it; you know there's always a welcome for you and any of your friends at Copperhurst. Now, Dolly, hurry, my lass; the gentlemen want their supper. Ah, here comes the master. Master, here's Mr. Jack Rangley; and Squire Wood's just dropped in with two friends to spend a few days with us."

The farmer, a silent slow-moving countryman, with blonde complexion and stiff golden hair, shook hands with his guests, giving a sidelong jerk of his head and inaudible greeting to Rangley, and a powerful grip of the hand to Friend and his companions. Then the men sat down to supper, waited on by Dolly and the maid while Mrs. Rayner directed their services.

It was evident that the beautiful Dolly had an admirer in the person of young Rangley; and evident also from

the gloom and sullenness of his manner that his suit was not prospering. Perhaps his dissatisfaction caused him to appear to less advantage than usual; for certainly Will thought him as ignorant and sullen a boor as ever he had met, and quite unworthy of Friend's cheerful and good-humored conversation. This opinion was shared by M. Sauvignac, whose quick eyes had taken in the situation at their first glance, and who vowed to himself that the girl deserved a better lover than that surly brute; and having said so, he would have been false to his own character if he had not also resolved to supply her with one in his own person. Friend's caution went for little with him; he was as incapable of understanding the idea of honor towards a woman as Friend himself was of the idea of patriotism. But the sore and jealous Rangsley did not fathom his intentions. It was to the handsome young stranger that his suspicions naturally turned; he looked at Will with a resentful and malignant eye, ready to misconstrue his every glance and gesture. Will did not comprehend the cause of his unfriendliness, but could not fail to be aware of it; and it did not tend to set him at his ease. He was already somewhat taken aback to find himself plunged into a community of smugglers; for the talk was all of the running of goods, the profits of sales, and of collisions with and outwittings of the Revenue officers. He had, it is true, no very decided opinions on the subject, and would have been quite ready to enter into the enthusiasm of his companions had it not been for his errand; but he could not help feeling it a little inconsistent with his position as a Government messenger. He bore it for a while well enough. He told himself that the fact that he had been brought here by Friend proved that he need have no hypersensitive misgivings on the score of his loyalty; and assured himself he had no reason to identify himself with the Excise. To hear of its defeats gave him no

pain; but diatribes against the Government made him uneasy. And Rangley, with the infallible instinct for annoyance of a jealous man, divined his feeling, and launched out into most spiteful invectives against the rulers of the country from the King downward. Friend in growing anxiety tried to turn the conversation in vain. When it came to attacks on the King Will could endure no more. He rose to his feet. "I would have you know, sir," he said, "that I am a servant of the Government and the bearer of an important despatch myself, and cannot sit here and——"

Rangley interrupted him. "Then you're a d—d spy!" he shouted, springing to his feet. Friend laid his hand on his arm. "No spy, no spy, Rangley," he said. "Sit down again; I'll explain all to you after supper. The lad has no harm in him; I know him to the bottom. I can make it all plain to you." And Mrs. Rayner hastened in with, "Now, Mr. Rangley, don't go for to make a disturbance at the table; sure you know you can trust any friend of Squire Wood's."

"I'm no spy," cried Will indignantly. "I have no interest in the undertakings of any gentleman here; you may all cheat the Revenue as much as you like for me; only I'll not sit here and hear my King abused."

"And quite right there, sir," said Farmer Rayner. "Cheat!" exclaimed Rangley. "What d'ye mean by saying, 'cheat' to me?"

"Come, come, Will," expostulated Friend.

In short, there was a pretty little quarrel, in the noise of which all joined more or less except Sauvignac. Friend tried to soothe Rangley, and Farmer Rayner, Will; while Dolly unfortunately brought matter to boiling-point again by putting in a word in Will's defense when she thought Friend too hard on him. This worked Rangley up to frenzy. He accused Will of being a paid informer; he banged his fist on the table with such

violence as to upset a heavy gallon jug of beer which stood by him; and finally, both Friend and his host putting themselves between him and the object of his wrath, he kicked over his chair with force sufficient to break the oaken cross-bar that connected its legs, and rushed out into the open air.

"Ah, well, we can't blame him; we see how the matter stands," said Friend with a look of intelligence. "We shall have to intercede with Dolly to smile on him a bit, shan't we, dame?"

"Indeed, Squire, I don't wish to have anything to say to him," said Dolly with her head up.

"Then I'm afraid there'll be rough times for a good many people on the Marsh besides ourselves, my dear," replied Friend. "He's a good friend of mine, is young Rangley; but a bear with a sore head is not an uglier customer than he is when he's put out."

"And that's true enough, Squire," said Mrs. Rayner; "and it's wishful I am his temper was sweeter, or else that he'd look elsewhere for a wife than to any daughter of mine; for Dolly she can't abide his violent ways; and the time we've had with him always hanging about the place—and him the last man we'd be wishful for to offend—I often say to my master here there'll be bloodshed by the end of it. They're a wild lot, they Rangleys."

"They are that, dame; but as brave as bulldogs and as true as steel. Dolly might do worse for herself than take one of the genuine old Marsh breed." But Dolly shook her head in silent determination.

After supper Friend made Mrs. Rayner sit down for a chat while he enjoyed his pipe, inquiring after all her large family by name, and listening with genuine interest to her lengthy details as to how Jack was doing at Lympne, and how Bill had been laid up for six weeks in the winter with a broken leg, and how Mrs. Coxeter,

the parson's lady at Smeeth, had offered to take Betsy into her service, and in short all the domestic events of the last twelve-month. The children came venturing into the room by twos and threes, and he had a word and a smile for each. Sauvignac meantime, much bored, had gone in search of the beautiful Dolly, and was displaying his utmost gallantry in helping her to clear the table, and showering his compliments upon her in his favorite strain of jocular flattery. She took it with unmoved composure. She did not understand his high-flown style; and by-and-by left him to put her little brothers and sisters to bed.

Will had been so unfortunate as to fall in with the irate Rangsley, who was hanging about the house in hopes of a few last words with Dolly before he left. He was somewhat mollified by perceiving that Will was not seeking her company, and attached himself to him with a view partly of preventing him from changing his mind, and partly of investigating his real character. Will found himself put through a sort of clumsy examination as to his employment and errand; and, resentful as he was of his previous conduct, resolved to afford him no satisfaction, made short answers, and at last abruptly left him. No further consolation befell the luckless lover that night; Dolly never as much as showed herself at a window; and the hour wearing late he had no resource but to take himself home.

They kept early hours at Copperhurst; at nine o'clock the doors were shut and they had all gone to their rooms. Will bethought him of his trust. During the day he had satisfied himself by seeing that his wallet was safe: its stiff sides gave no indication of the loss of their contents; but now he judged it safe to satisfy his eyes of their presence. He opened the pouch. It was empty. He gazed with incredulous eyes; he looked wildly round the room to see if he had dropped the packet unconsciously;

he turned again to the wallet. Its vacuity gave him no information.

When he realized that the papers were gone indeed, he bounded to the door, rushed along the passage and hurled himself, without knocking, without warning, into Friend's room. "Mr. Friend!" he gasped, "I have been robbed—I am ruined!"

"Robbed? Ruined? What d'ye mean, lad?" asked Friend, turning quickly.

"Look here!" gasped poor Will, thrusting the empty wallet into his hands. "It is gone—gone! The wallet is empty. I have lost Lord Nelson's despatch! It must have been taken. I am robbed—robbed, I tell you!"

"You have been robbed of Lord Nelson's despatch? Is that what you say, lad? This is a pretty to-do!"

"It must have been stolen, Mr. Friend! I've looked at it every night, and felt the pouch every hour of the day—and this evening when I come to look, I find it empty! Oh, it is sheer ruin! Who is the scoundrel who has done it?"

"This is a strange job, Will," said Friend slowly and gravely. "Who can have done it?"

"Help me to find the thief, Mr. Friend. I must find him; I must get back my papers; my life depends upon it. Don't you see? My future—my fortune—Susan—everything! Help me, Mr. Friend! If anyone in the world can, you're the man."

"That's a good deal truer than you think, lad," was Friend's internal comment with keen enjoyment; but he said, gravely and thoughtfully as before: "As you say, Will, the thing is to find the thief. When did it happen? Are you sure you had the packet last night?"

"Quite certain. It was only last night I was looking at the seals, and thinking how well and clearly they were impressed. And I felt the pouch constantly during the day."

"And never took it off you until just now?"

"No—except in that wood where we had our swim, when you watched it for me."

"Yes, I had it in my hand the whole while. It must have been taken from the pouch while on you, Will. It's the only possibility."

"But who could have done it? We've met no one."

"We stopped at three inns; the one at Tonbridge, the Red Lion at Tildesden, and that one at Woodchurch; but no one there would know your errand. It must have been some one who knew and who had an interest in taking them, either to spite the Government, or to do you an ill turn."

"Rangsley!" cried Will, struck with sudden certainty.

"Nonsense, Will; impossible! I know young Rangsley well—have known him for years. The thing's impossible! The fellow may have a grudge against the Government on the score of the Excise, and I know he's rather bitter just now on account of all the soldiers in the Marsh, who interfere with trade; but theft he's incapable of. I'll answer for him with my life, Will."

"But, Mr. Friend, consider! He knew. I let out—stupidly enough like a fool as I am—that I carried despatches. Who else was there who knew? And you say he has a grudge against Government, and he seems to have taken one against me, goodness only knows why. Who else could it possibly have been? It isn't possible any one else in this house—Farmer Rayner or his wife——"

"Oh, no, no, impossible. More simple, honest souls never breathed. I don't know what to think, lad. It's impossible Rangsley should have played such a trick; and yet——"

"But who else is there who could possibly have done it?"

"Let us sleep upon it, lad. It needs a cool head. I

can't believe it of Rangsley; and yet—— It looks a deuced cold-blooded trick. No; I can't believe it of Rangsley. Go back to bed and sleep upon it, Will; we'll talk of it in the morning. It needs wary walking; for I warn you, Rangsley's an ugly customer to quarrel with."

"The uglier the better; I'm not afraid of him. I can't sleep, Mr. Friend, till I'm on the track of my papers. My honor is at stake. I'll ride after him——"

"Nonsense, Will; go back to bed. Your horse is tired; we've come a good thirty miles today; and you'll want him tomorrow. It'll be time enough to tackle Rangsley in the morning, if no other light turns up. I can't believe it of him. If he it was, it was only a joke, a trick to plague you. You'll get the papers back right enough, I'll be bound. Now go to bed, young un; I want to get to mine; I'm dead sleepy."

Partially satisfied, Will withdrew. He was inclined to think Friend took the matter a little too coolly; but that, after all, was natural if the affair were only an ill-natured trick. He had not a doubt left concerning Rangsley's guilt. Appearances were too strong against him.

CHAPTER XVI

FISTICUFFS

WILL was wild to ride in pursuit of Rangsley with the first morning light, and reclaim his packet either by persuasion or force; but Friend put him off on various pretexts hour by hour, bidding him first wait for breakfast and then for other reasons, till he saw he could restrain him no longer without exciting remark. In fact, he was not at all anxious that Will should confront Rangsley on this errand, anticipating that mischief either to North or to himself would be the certain issue. But the false scent had certainly been of service to him so far, and he thought it safest on the whole to let him take his own way.

Will once off the scene, he carried Sauvignac up to Aldington Knoll, a little rocky eminence lying just across the road in front of the house. But though from their situation the ascent was only slight, on the further side the ground fell away several hundred feet right down to the level of the plain; and the Knoll jutting forward from the long range of hill that marks the ancient coastline, commands a wide view of Romney Marsh, from the hill crowned by the ancient castle of Lympne to distant Fairlight Cliff by Hastings. No better spot could be found for a study of the coast threatened by Napoleon; and his two agents spent an engrossing hour discussing the land and its defenses, Friend explaining the positions of the different townlets, Dymchurch, Romney, Lydd,

and even the far-off Rye and Winchelsea on their low spurs of hill. He pointed out the dangers of the promontory of Dungeness with its treacherous currents, and fixed the spot, a mile west of Dymchurch, where the landing might best be effected on the flat sandy shore, the defenses of the district being drawn off as arranged to the smuggling fight.

"We must have a signal from here," he said, "to guide our friends. There's no spot like this in all the country. There's a fellow I know on the other side, a smuggler from Biville, who has often been across on our errands, and who knows this coast as well as his own, who can bring in the fleet with the help of a beacon on the Knoll, however dark the night is."

"And we shall want a guide to lead the troops over the Marsh. That will be your task, *mon ami, hein?*"

"Oh, no; I must be at Hythe with my fellows to share the fun there. It'll be expected of me. I've a large interest in the cargo, you see; and the boys will want some one to lead them. There'll be the Rangseys, of course, and Jack Carter from Romney; but I must be there to supply brains to the party."

"They will need no brains better than their own; and what matters it what they think? We must have a good guide; and whom have we who knows the Marsh like you?"

"Any Marsh man can guide the troops. I must be with my smuggling boys. I have got the poor fellows into this scrape, and I must be with them to see it through."

"But what matters it what happens to them? You must not think of them, my friend; you must think of our Cause. And suppose you are knocked on the head in the scuffle, or worse, are taken prisoner? It would be a pretty position for you, Dubois."

"I can take care of myself," said Friend. "Look

here, Sauvignac; to leave my boys in the lurch—how can I do it? This is no affair of theirs; they are bought and sold, poor fellows; sold long ago, when I first took shares in the *All's Well*; I can't throw them over now."

"But your smugglers do not matter at all; it is the Emperor's work that counts; the Emperor to whom you are pledged. You are not your own master now, Dubois."

"I am not going to leave my friends in this pickle, whatever the Emperor wants," said Friend decidedly. "I've got them into the scrape, and I'll see it out with them whatever happens. That's fixed; and you can tell his Majesty so. As for you, you won't be on the scene, I suppose. You're not wanted here; I can arrange the beacon quite well without you; and there's nothing else left that needs your help. All we want now is to know the date."

"Oh, I shall return. I shall bring word of the date," said Sauvignac. "Say I stay here two or three more days, and then return in one week more. I should guess it will be in two or three weeks' time. No longer than that, *mon ami*, and then our friends here will find themselves subjects of a new sovereign. Your proud and treacherous country will be at the feet of our Emperor! What glory for us! You and I may be proud of our work, my friend."

But this outburst of satisfaction raised no response in Friend's mind; on the contrary, it woke an uncomfortable sensation as they left the Knoll and strolled back to the house. He was not wont to reflect on his aims; he had chosen his path many years ago, and had pursued it without scruple or hesitation; but now the question forced itself on him, whether he really wished to see Napoleon master of England? He felt the idea disagreeable, he knew not why. He stood to gain immensely by the success of the invasion; if on the other

hand it failed, his ruin was imminent; and yet he found himself on the point of wishing that it should fail. He pulled himself up angrily. "What's the good of thinking? I've chosen my part," he said to himself. "I'm for action; thought was always poison to me. Thank goodness there's plenty to be done, and plenty hanging on the issue. No petty aims for me; when I play, I throw for high stakes." With an impatient shrug of the shoulders he returned to the consideration of the present situation. Sauvignac was again in pursuit of Dolly. He went in search of Mrs. Rayner, and managed to say a word apart to her. "Keep Dolly as much out of Mr. Morgan's way as you can, dame. He's a married man; and he's not to be trusted where a pretty girl's in the case."

But Mrs. Rayner's simple precautions had little chance when pitted against a man of M. Sauvignac's address. His gallantry, however, was quite thrown away upon Dolly Rayner. She did not understand him; he pitched him note too high for her comprehension; and by-and-by he perceived it and was piqued. Friend's watchfulness, too, was an incentive; he became aware of a tacit guard on his actions, and instantly resolved to outwit his vigilance. His pursuit, at first the merest idleness, now became serious. His vanity was touched; he was resolved to teach the ignorant proud girl his quality; he was not to be foiled by mere insensibility. He changed his tactics. He dropped his jokes and his rhodomontade; he became respectful, assiduous, earnest. He drew her out and made her talk, and listened with reverential observance; he spoke of himself and his hopes and longings, the emptiness of his life, and his need of love. Dolly referred to his marriage; and then he claimed her pity; he told her it had been the misfortune of his life. He threw a shade of sadness into his manner; and touched and sympathizing, Dolly began to listen to him.

It was an amusing experiment to him "to make love sadly, like an Englishman," as he phrased it; and he did it deplorably well. Friend noticed Dolly's growing interest, and began to get exceedingly uneasy.

The comedy proceeded with interruptions of violent disturbance from Will, who returned having failed to find Rangsley at home, and who filled the whole neighborhood with his rage and despair. He thought his friends strangely composed over his misfortune. Friend, it was true, gave him sympathy enough, but made no helpful suggestions, nor showed the resourcefulness which all who knew him instinctively looked for from him; Mr. Morgan openly grinned and made sport of him; and Mrs. Rayner, though most kindly concerned and interjecting as many "Dear, dears!" and "Who'd ha' thought it?" and "Well, now, if that isn't a pity," as he tried to draw, obviously betrayed that the whole matter was not as important to her as the welfare of the last litter of pigs. He raved and stormed; he turned the house upside down and inside out in a hopeless search for his papers; he went off again to look for Rangsley, inquiring out all his customary haunts, and tried his utmost to induce his companion to join him; but Friend responded with much regret that his business forbade him for the present to give any assistance. Mr. Morgan's safety must be his first consideration; and he had heard at last of a vessel to which he could be safely entrusted. So with the greatest relief he took his troublesome charge to Hythe and shipped him off, vowing to himself he would never suffer him to revisit Copperhurst till Dolly should be safely married.

Will was hanging about the house in a fret and fume during his absence, having again failed to find his quarry, when fate kindly sent the man he wanted straight into his arms. Rangsley, driven by his restless desire to see Dolly, rode up to Copperhurst towards five in the

afternoon, and dismounting, found himself face to face with Will.

"You are just the man I wanted," exclaimed he; "I have been looking for you everywhere, Mr. Rangsley."

"Them that looks for me has only to do it on the open and they'll find me sure enough," said Rangsley defiantly, for Will's manner conveyed a threat. "It's not my custom to shirk them that wants me. And what do you want with me, young fellow?"

"I think you know well enough, Mr. Rangsley. I want a certain packet of papers I missed from my person the evening I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance."

"You want a packet of papers? G—d d—n your impudence, sir, what has that got to do with me? You haven't the coolness to suppose I took 'em?" He garnished his speech with more oaths and sulphureous expressions than the customs of our day permit the historian to repeat.

"No, sir; I know very well you did," replied Will. "Come, Mr. Rangsley, if you did it for a jest, hand the packet back and I will say no more about it. It's a serious business, sir—a Government matter; no affair for fooling. Give me back the papers; or, I warn you, mischief will come of it."

"I tell you I know nothing of your confounded papers!" cried Rangsley with a volley of startling oaths. "D'ye take me for a liar? D'ye want to fight?" Dolly's face appeared peeping from behind a curtain at an upper window; the sight revived his jealousy in force. He began stripping off his coat. "Come on, then! I'm your man! I'll give you the best drubbing you ever had in your life, you miserable white-lievered Government spy!"

"You'd better take care, Mr. Rangsley, or you'll get more than you bargain for; I'm no novice with the

mauleys," said Will. "But come; I don't want a row. I want my papers; hand them over to me in Heaven's name; or, I warn you, you'll repent it."

Rangsley's only answer was a sudden blow; Will dodged it barely in time. "Well, if you will have it——" he cried, struggling to pull off his coat, Rangsley dancing after him with his fists up. "Don't think I'm afraid of you—let me only get my coat off—come into the stack-yard, you'll fall easy there on the straw."

"I'll pound you; I'll smash your bones for you! Aha, afraid, are you—want to fall soft on the straw?" jeered Rangsley, acutely conscious of Dolly's presence, though as soon as she perceived that Rangsley saw her she had disappeared. "You shall make the acquaintance of the feel of these stones before many minutes have passed, I can promise you, my fine city spy!" But at length Will had freed himself from his coat, and lost no time in silencing his adversary with a lightning-swift blow full in the mouth, which Rangsley had not the skill to avoid. Filled with scorn by Will's peaceable demeanor, he was astonished to find himself confronted with a foe fully versed in the science of the noble art, which he himself, confiding in his uncommon muscular power, had always scorned; but of courage at least he had no lack. The windows were filled with faces; Mrs. Rayner with uplifted hands and eyes was at the kitchen window, the servant-girl was in the doorway, and the children's heads craned eagerly out above; the consciousness of Dolly hiding behind the curtain fired Rangsley to madness. But his courage and fury could only prompt him to a wild and savage attack, easily foiled by Will's superior knowledge. It was a simple matter to him, comparatively cool as he was, to avoid Rangsley's rushes and parry his blows; he had only to wait till his adversary had exhausted himself and his victory was certain. But Rangsley's impatience did not even allow

him to wear himself out; blind with rage, he offered an easy mark to Will, who let out a swift and powerful blow, and down went Rangsley on the stones he had vowed to introduce to his enemy. He was up again in a second; again and again he rushed at Will, each time blinder, madder than before; again and again he went down like a shot rabbit before Will's long arm. Muddy, bruised, his nose and mouth streaming with blood, he presented a sorry spectacle. But no whit was he daunted; till Will, pitying his unavailing courage, and seeing that he would never give in of his own accord, let out with all his force, and he dropped for the last time senseless on the ground. A cheer went up from the spectators. Will, unbruised and almost untouched, picked up his coat and put it on. Then he stooped over the prostrate Rangsley. He gave no sign of life. "Here, Jim!" cried Will to one of the farm lads who was sitting astride the wall and throwing up his cap with shouts; "fetch a pail of water for Mr. Rangsley." Mrs. Rayner hurried out with a basin and dashed water over his head. In a few minutes he began to revive; his eyelids quivered and he uttered a deep groan. Will blew on his face and flicked him with a wet handkerchief. while Mrs. Rayner wiped off the blood and rubbed his hands. Presently he opened his eyes, looked round him wildly, and with an effort, closing his lips tightly, sat up.

"How, are you better, Rangsley?" said Will. "By Gad, man, I was almost afraid I'd done for you. I should have been sorry if I'd split your skull."

Rangsley, looking very white and sick, said nothing, but cast his eyes up at the window where Dolly had been seen. She was not in sight. He shook his head between humiliation and nausea, using all his strength to repress another groan. Then, repulsing Will's attempt to help him, he scrambled to his feet. "Come, man, shake hands; there's no ill-will left, I hope?" said Will.

But Rangsley made no reply. Muttering a curse, he turned away and shambled uncertainly to the horse-block where he had left his nag tied to the ring in the wall. Will followed him anxiously, uncertain if he were capable of mounting. But he would have no help. Blindly and shaking like a drunken man, he untied the knot, and after one or two unsuccessful efforts hoisted himself into the saddle. Then he turned to Will and cursed him with great force and feeling, and rode out of the yard.

"Dear heart alive, there'll be sore times now for somebody!" sighed Mrs. Rayner. "Young Mr. Rangsley, he's not one to forgive a beating like this. But are ye not hurt, Master North? He's a powerful fighter, is Jack Rangsley; and to see you let him down as easy as if he was a blind puppy! La, but you're a master with your fists, sir; I wouldn't ha' believed there was living man who could ha' done it!"

"I've had some experience with my fists, dame; worse luck for me," said Will. "But what's to do now? I'm no nearer getting my papers. Ass and blockhead that I am, why didn't I think to search his pockets?"

But the opportunity was gone; and Will had to decide on a fresh plan of action, and moreover unassisted, for Friend was spending the night at Hythe. He could think of no satisfactory plan, however, and resolved to await his return. In the meantime the fight filled every one's minds and mouths. "By G—d now, but I like a chap as can keep his head with his fists," said the farmer, his tongue unloosed for once by excitement. "There's nothing like an Englishman for that, is there, sir? Now among the Mounseers, who we're looking to see over here, so they say, one o' these fine days, if two fellows have a bit of difference, they'll out with their knives, so they tell me, and stick each other as I would a pig."

"Ay, poor creatures; they haven't the strength to

stand up to each other like you and Mr. Jack Rangsley, sir," said Mrs. Rayner. "Why, I've heard tell they feed on frogs and snails and such-like vermin; it stands to reason they've not the strength to hit each other like men on such a diet."

"And they talk of invading us," said the farmer with fine scorn. "Pass us the ale-jug, wife. Ah! Good English beef and beer forever. We aren't afraid of old Boney and his Mounseers while we make brawn like this. Here's what'll keep our shores safe." And he took a deep draught of his own home-brewed.

But with the morning, Friend's return being still uncertain, Will could endure no longer to remain inactive. Left to himself it seemed to him there was nothing for it but to get Rangsley arrested and examined by a magistrate. His behavior hardly warranted the supposition that the theft was a mere joke or malicious trick. And even if it had been, now that milder measures had failed Will saw no resource but to invoke the help of the law. So, his resolution being taken, he rode off to the nearest magistrate and applied for a warrant for Rangsley's arrest. To his surprise he found it a more difficult matter than he had supposed. The magistrate showed an unaccountable reluctance to act; pooh-poohed the affair, vowed it was all a joke and a mistake, declined again and again to grant the warrant, and when Will insisted, exhausted his ingenuity in finding excuses. Will was obliged to talk big about Government and the Prime Minister and the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Foreign Secretary, showing a closer acquaintance with these eminent personages than he could in strict truth claim; and he could perceive he produced the desired effect. The magistrate was plainly terrified; and at last in a hasty nervous way made out and handed to him the warrant. "Here it is, young man," he said. "Here it is since you will have it; but

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remember, I wash my hands of it. I'll have nothing to do with the affair; I've warned you of the consequences; don't blame me if evil befalls. I wash my hands of the whole affair."

"You'll let me have a couple of men to effect the arrest, I suppose?" said Will.

"Oh, I suppose you can take a couple of constables; but it's your own doing, your own doing entirely. Don't say I didn't warn you. I wish to have nothing to do with it."

Will did not care whether the magistrate had much or little to do with it as long as he got his warrant and his men; and rode off, followed by the two constables, feeling blither than he had since the discovery of his loss. But the day was wearing on. It was already past noon before he obtained his interview with the representative of the law, who after a night of conviviality was somewhat late in rising; then the constables had to be found and fetched; and when they started at last they had a long ride before them, for Rangsley House, the home, half farm, half manor-house, of the redoubted smuggling clan was eighteen miles from the Hythe magistrate.

They arrived, however, without mishap. They were admitted by a blowsy virago of twenty-five or so, a daughter of the house, whose active and martial bearing went far to justify the tales Will had been hearing from his companions on the way of the masculine feats of her and her sister. The Rangsley women were as bold and determined smugglers as any of the men of their race; they used to go in person with their male companions to meet and land their contraband goods, sitting astride of their horses like men, said Rumor, with pistols stuck in their belts. "Ay, and use 'em too sometimes, the vixens!" said the constable. But unsuspecting of their errand, the heroine admitted Will and his companions,

telling them they would find her brother in the parlor.

Rangsley, his head tied up in a cloth, was stretched on a hard black horsehair sofa, a table with a bottle of brandy and a tumbler on it beside him. He sat up suddenly as Will entered.

"Come, Mr. Rangsely, I am sorry to disturb your repose, and sorry too for my unpleasant errand," said Will, "but we've not yet finished our little affair, you and I. I'm bound to cause you more trouble unless you'll end the matter in a sensible way without further fuss. Will you hand over to me that packet of Government despatches you took from my pouch the other night?"

"D—n you and your despatches!" exclaimed Rangsley.

"Swear as much as you like, but I'm going to have them; and if you don't hand them over peaceably I'll carry you before a magistrate who'll force you to give them up."

"You'll carry me before a magistrate?" cried Rangsley, too much astonished even to swear.

"I will. I've got the warrant in my pocket, and there are two constables outside the door. Now, will you give them up peaceably, or will you come quietly, or must we take you?"

A volley of execrations was the only reply. Will opened the door and called the constables. Rangsley rushed at them, shouting for help. By a rare chance he and his sister were alone in the house, so the constables' task should have been a light one. But even enfeebled as he was with his late overthrow, Rangsley was no easy conquest; and whilst they struggled, his sister rushed in and threw herself with the utmost spirit into the fray, hitting out with the vigor of a man, and clinging and clawing in a manner still more embarrassing to her opponents. "D—n the jade, choke her off, can't

you—she's throttling me," gasped the constable whom she had selected for her attentions. The other came to his assistance, but only by using very ungallant force could he release his comrade. Will had by this time fastened Rangley's arms. Bring him away, lads; never mind the young woman," he said. "We've got him; that's the main thing; let's be off at once."

"We must silence that screeching bitch, though, or we shall have trouble; she'll bring the whole gang on us," remonstrated the constable. "Knock her over the head, Bill."

"Shame, man; would you hit a woman?" cried Will. "Let her go, and let's be off."

"Stuff a handkerchief into her mouth then and tie her up. We shall be in a pretty pickle if we don't. But Will, revolting from the idea of violence to a female and eager to be off, would not stay; he and one of the constables dragged Rangley to the door and with considerable difficulty got him upon a horse; while the remaining man took what measures his caution prompted for silencing the yelling Miss Rangley.

Once on horseback and in motion the captive struggled no longer, but abandoned himself to his fate in passive sullenness. Will put the horses to a trot; and in a few moments their companion came galloping after. "We'd better put our best foot forward, sir," he said; I've gagged that vixen but, the men'll be in soon and set her free; and then we shall have the whole gang after us as sure as eggs is eggs. We must get him into safety before dark, or our lives won't be worth a rotten rope. I wish to Heaven we were well out of this business." Will thought the counsel good, though he could not believe the danger to be so great or so imminent as the constables seemed to think; and the party pushed on at a brisk pace.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SMUGGLERS' REVENGE

WILL was taking his prisoner to Ashford, the nearest place where he could be bestowed in safety; but the sun had already set, the light was failing, and it was evident that night would be upon them before they reached the shelter of the streets. The constables often looked back over their shoulders, and hearkened anxiously for the sounds of pursuit. They were still a couple of miles from the town when the unmistakable noise of horses' hoofs at a gallop reached their ears.

"They're after us; all's up, sir! We're dead men," exclaimed one.

"Nonsense, man; don't be chicken-hearted!" cried Will angrily. "First, we're not taken yet; and how do you know those fellows are after us? And even if they are, we are three; we can give a good account of ourselves, I hope."

"Why, there'll be a score of 'em, sir. Let's leave the prisoner and ride for our lives. We may reach Ashford if we push for it."

"Not without the prisoner," said Will, snatching at the bridle-rein of Rangley's horse and urging him to a faster pace. Rangley uttered an ugly laugh.

"I tell you, sir, our lives are at stake," repeated the constable. "You don't know this Old Bourne gang that the Rangleys lead. They're the most desperate characters on the Marsh. Let go that horse if you value your life, sir, and ride!"

"Ride yourself if you're afraid," said Will shortly. "I've got my man and I stick to him; and they can kill me if they choose before I give him up."

"Well, if that's your last word, sir, we must stay and take our chance; but our blood'll be on your head, that's all."

The noise of hoofs was rapidly gaining on them. Their tired horses could make no speed, and presently a great shout announced that their pursuers had caught sight of them. Will turned in his saddle and glanced back. In the gathering dusk the road looked full of men; a shouting mob with waving arms and galloping horses was bearing down on them. Resistance was plainly useless; but so was flight. With a sudden impulse Will wheeled round his horse and faced the enemy. The constables behind him did the same, drawing close to the prisoner.

"Ahoy!" shouted one of the attackers, seeing the change of front. "Is that Jack Rangley you've got there?"

"It is. I've a warrant for his arrest. I warn you it's at your peril you attempt to rescue him."

A great laugh was the only answer to his threat. A voice shouted "Come on, boys!" and the whole mass of men bore down on the little party. In an instant Will was conscious of nothing but the deafening explosion and thick smoke of firearms, the jostling and hard breathing of horses in his ears, and the hail of heavy blows. He hit out as well as he could, and was aware that one of the constables had fallen from his horse and that the other had made off and was in rapid flight. His prisoner was already in the hands of the rescuers. Then with a groan his horse fell under him. He leapt free of it, and quick as light threw himself in front of Rangley on his saddle, fired his pistol into some one's face, and dug his spurs deep into the horse to make

him rear and shake off the men who clung to saddle and bridle, hoping by one desperate effort to clear himself from the throng and gallop off with his prisoner. But too many strong were the hands that dragged him down; with a violent struggle he came heavily to the ground. A dozen hands were at work to bind him before he could move to recover himself. He fought, but quite in vain; and in ten minutes, bound, gaged, and helpless, he was placed again in the saddle with his feet tied together under the horse's belly.

Half stunned with the shock and the rough handling he had received, he lent but scant attention to the babel of voices, laughter, and oaths around him. The party, with Rangsley in triumph in their midst, turned backwards along the road they had come. Will wondered stupidly what his fate was to be, and what had become of the two constables. Presently some one close to his side accosted him. He recognized 'Rangsley's voice, jeering at him, triumphing over his ill-success, and threatening him with a rich revenge for the insults he had heaped upon him, and his treacherous designs of betrayal. But Will could barely understand him. His head was aching as if about to split from the blows he had received; his bonds cut his wrists and ankles; fatigue and the pain of his bruises stupefied his senses and made Rangsley's taunts a wearisome and well-nigh unendurable but meaningless sound. At last they reached the manor-house. There was a great dismounting; a trampling of horses and a confusion of voices, shouting and laughter. The girth that bound Will's feet was cut; he was roughly pulled from his seat, and fell rather than climbed from his horse. A crowd of rough voices and rougher arms pushed and dragged him into the house; there were women present, and he recognized one as the sister of Rangsley he had already met. Then a door opened before him; he was pushed violently down

a passage and into a dark cellar, fell over a step which descended into it; and too sore and weary to rise, lay motionless on the floor, and immediately fell into a deep sleep of exhaustion.

Meanwhile the Rangley family and the band of smugglers they headed were holding high revel to celebrate their triumph. A keg of Cognac was rolled in from its hiding-place and broached, enormous joints of beef, both roast and boiled, and huge wedges of cheese were placed on the board, and a feast of Gargantuan plenty was begun, whose most attractive ingredient was the prospect of torturing a defeated enemy. Rangley had no doubt at all that Will was a spy of the Excise sent to discover the habits and haunts of the smugglers and to break up the gang by effecting his arrest. Absolutely ignorant on the subject of the Government despatches, he supposed Will's persistency on the point a mere veil for his real purpose. He had no fear of the local authorities at Hythe, Woodchurch, and Appledore; they were well known to be interested themselves in the illegal traffic, and would afford him every protection in their power; but at Ashford, a town of some importance, the justices would not dare to screen so noted a law-breaker. He had felt himself therefore in some real danger; and as his jealousy of Will on Dolly Rayner's account, and his beating at his hands under her very eyes had provoked a lively personal hatred, he was ready for a really stirring and satisfactory revenge. Of course, his brothers and sisters and the other members of the gang shared his view; every one who was not a friend was to them necessarily a Government spy or an enemy.

Opinion during the feast was only divided as to what fate should be allotted him. "Let's hang him," said one. "Drown him in a tub of Cognac," suggested another. "No, don't spoil good liquor by wasting it on a scoundrel

like that. Hang him up by the thumbs from the top attic window, and wait till he drops on the stones."

"Let's have him in and see how he takes it," said one of the women. The idea was welcomed; and Will, roughly aroused from sleep, was brought into the large stone-paved hall, lit by flaring torches and many a tallow-candle, where seventeen or eighteen men and three or four women were seated at a long table. Will, his arms still tied behind him, was set at the foot.

"Now, Mr. Spy," said the elder of the Rangley brothers, known all over the Marsh as "the Squire," "we're going to give you a lesson not to come into these parts on your sneaking errands again."

"Ay, we'll teach him a lesson that Gover'ment in London'll hear of, and think twice before they meddles with us again."

"What shall it be, young lickspittle? Will 'ee hang, or shoot, or drown?"

"Do you intend to kill me?" asked Will. He could not credit it. His head was still confused from his deep sleep; but he saw danger in the hard faces that surrounded him. Rangley laughed aloud in answer. "Oh no, pretty dear!" scoffed his sister. "Such a mother's pet as this can't be touched, can he now? He's to come spying at his pleasure, and send men to the gallows just as he likes, and not a finger's to be laid on him, because he's such a pretty fellow, just down from London with such nice clothes and such pretty manners!"—"See him change color!" cried the other sister triumphantly.

"You are wrong in calling me a spy," said Will. "I am no spy."

"No spy! And he came with a warrant in his pocket! Ah, the lying villain!" cried Jenny. She drew out a pistol, and leveled it at his head. Will winced in spite of himself. "See him duck!" she cried in delight. "See him! Shall I? Shall I let him have it?"

Will drew himself together. If his last hour had come he would at least meet it with courage; but his brain refused to credit it. "It is monstrous! It is incredible!" his mind repeated. But the murderous mouth of the pistol confronted him unsparingly, and the ferocious triumph of the young woman's face gave no token of relenting. Suddenly a flash dazzled his eyes and something whistled, stinging and burning, past his head. She had intentionally missed him, just grazing the tip of his ear. "Well shot, Jenny!" cried the men, jeering. "Try again, lass!"

"Pass me your powder-horn, Joe," she said, and coolly reloaded. The thought of Susan rushed upon Will's mind with an agony of revolt; he would not, he could not die and lose her. The pistol was pointing at him again; involuntarily he closed his eyes. "Look! He's at his prayers!" cried Jenny with a shriek of insulting laughter. "Ay, he'll have need to pray before we've done with him," said the elder Rangsley grimly.

She fired again; Will with a great effort kept his face steady and did not move. "Well, since he likes it, let's give him some more," said with a horse laugh an elderly man with a hard, brutal face all inflamed with debauchery. With a tipsy hand he drew out a pistol and leveled it at Will. Others did the like; one shot after another rang out till the room was full of smoke; the bullets whistled round his head. They did not intend to kill him; they were merely playing with him before they came to business; but it was a marvel he was not hit. He did not blench; he set his teeth and drew in his breath, his heart hardened to a stone with suppressed rebellion and rage.

"Come, lads, that's enough," said Rangsley impatiently. "Let's get on to the real sport; you've wasted enough powder and shot over that fool's play. Where's a rope? Let's string him up and ha' done with it."

"Yes, outside the top window, by his thumbs."

"Nay, the house is not high enough; he'd no more than break a few bones. We'll string him up in the doorway, and watch him dancing on air as we drink."

One of the men produced a strong cord; Rangley knotted it into a running noose. "Will the hook above the door hold?" asked some one. Two or three hastened to push a table below the doorway, standing on which they tested the hook by grasping it and then swinging on it with their whole weight. It stood perfectly firm. "Now, then, fetch him along, lads! We'll teach the Gover'nment to send spies to arrest us!"

Rangley threw the noose over Will's head, coming close up to him to draw it tight with a vicious jerk. "I'll teach you to come in Jack Rangley's path!" he said in his ear. "You thought you'd hang me and get me out of your way, did you? Well, it's you who are to hang now. Take your leave of life; for in five minutes you'll be a dead man."

A dozen arms pulled and pushed him forward to the doorway. The choking tightness of the rope round his throat gave him no room to think; he was conscious only of blind, passionate revolt and a pride that withheld him from futile resistance and caused him to stiffen his muscles and hold up his head. As they neared the doorway some one approached it from without, and finding the way barred by the table, laid hands on it and vaulted lightly over into the room. With a violent shock of relief and gratitude Will recognized John Friend.

"Hullo, lads!" he cried out. "Hullo, Squire! And Jack—how are you? What's all this? What's doing here?"

"Why, Squire Wood, ye're just in time to see a little work o' justice carried out. We've taken a spy, and are going to hang him."

"But this is no spy, man! Why, this is a young friend o' my own, a lad called Will North I brought down with me to help me on a bit of an affair I have with Mayor Jempson of Hythe. Here's some mistake, my lads."

"No mistake, no mistake, Wood," growled the elder Rangley. "The fellow came with a warrant in his pocket, and actually had the impudence to clap up and carry off my brother Jack."

"I swear it was a mistake, Squire," returned Friend earnestly. "I know the boy like my own son; you didn't understand his errand. He'd never heard o' the Free Traders of Romney Marsh before I brought him down here three days ago. All he knows o' Government is that he's taking letters from Lord Nelson, God bless him, down to Pitt at Folkestone, letters of the highest importance about the war, and with all the plans of balking old Boney's invasion. That's all his errand. And through some accident he has mislaid the letters, and has got some maggot or other in his brain which makes him pick out our friend Jack as the man who's robbed him. He's no spy; not he! He's only a young fool with better meaning than brains, who don't know his friends from foes. Let the lad go, my boys! I'll be responsible for him. I'll take him off with me, and pledge you my word he shall never set foot within twenty miles of the Marsh again. And I warn you, if he disappears, there'll be the deuce of an inquiry after those letters of his."

There was an uncomfortable silence among the men. They looked at each other in doubt. Then Rangley growled, "But he'd got a warrant, by —— he had, Wood. He came with a couple o' constables into the very house."

"Well, and what better proof could you have that he knew no more o' the Old Bourne Free Traders than the

babe unborn? If he'd really come from London with instructions to arrest you, d'ye think he'd ha' walked into the house to arrest Jack Rangsley with only a couple of constables? Why, he'd sooner ha' stuck his bare hand into a nest o' hornets to draw out the queen. No, if he'd really come from Government he'd ha' come with a troop of horse, and then ha' waited till he'd found Jack Rangsley drunk or off his guard away from all his friends. Why, the boy was mad! If I hadn't been off on business at Hythe this would never have happened. I'll look after him better in future. Come, loosen that rope from his throat; I'll take him off with me; and I promise you you shall have no further trouble with him. Hand us that knife, Jenny lass."

Half unwillingly she passed him a knife; and partly pulling, partly cutting, he loosened the rope round the prisoner's neck and threw it to the ground. Then, taking firm hold of Will by the arm, he marched him resolutely to the door. "Push aside that table, lads," he commanded authoritatively. As if they hardly understood what was passing, two men obeyed him. Rangsley interposed as if to prevent them from leaving the room; Friend put him quietly aside. "No, Jack, don't stop us," he said; "it'll be better for you to let him go. There are deep waters here, my friend. You *must* let me take him; he's not safe fish for your net." And pushing forward determinedly, he led Will out of the house. Two horses waited in the yard. "Can ye mount, lad?" asked Friend. "I doubt they've mishandled you a bit." Will nodded; he could hardly speak, his throat was still so choked and swollen. But when he tried to swing himself into the saddle he found himself unable to raise his weight from the ground. Friend came behind him and hoisted him up as if he were helping a lady to mount. "There, you're up now, young un; you can sit tight in the saddle when once you're there, I trust.

Now then, let's be off; the farther we get from Rangley House the better for us."

They rode off at a brisk pace. Gradually Will revived; but they had gone some miles before he spoke.

"You got there just in time, Mr. Friend," he said, his voice shaking. "What made you think of coming to my rescue?"

"Why, lad," said Friend, smiling, "when I got back to Copperhurst, Mrs. Rayner told me of your lunatic's scheme of getting a warrant for Jack Rangley's arrest, and I set out at once. It needed no more weighing whether you were likely to want help or not than whether you'd want a poultice if you put your arm into a boiling kettle. You might as well have taken a magistrate's warrant to arrest a den of tigers. I warned you they were ugly customers, the Rangleys. I hardly thought to get you out of their hands so easily."

"I shall be eternally grateful to you, Mr. Friend."

"Well, my boy, I believe you will before the night's over." Will did not understand his meaning, but was not yet in a condition to want explanations. They rode on in silence.

It was past midnight when they arrived at Copperhurst. Mrs. Rayner was sitting up for them, and had a couple of basins of steaming broth ready for their refreshment. When they had despatched them they went upstairs to their rooms; Friend followed Will to his.

"I've been able to do you another service, Will," he said when the door was shut, looking rather confused or at least conscious; "I can't answer any questions as to how I've managed it; but I've got your packet back for you." He drew from an inner pocket of his coat a parcel; Will tore it open, and beheld his missing papers, with the Government seal intact! He grasped Friend by the hand and tried to speak, but his voice failed him;

he was not in time to repress a sob of gratitude. Friend wrung his hand.

"You got them from—you made the thief give them up?" asked Will at last.

"I can't answer any questions, I tell you, my boy. There they are for you; let that be enough. You'll find they are all safe."

"Mr. Friend, I owe you more than my life to-night," said Will brokenly. "You have saved my life—you have saved my honor."

"Tut-tut-tut!" exclaimed Friend, smiling impatiently. "There, that's enough, young un. Good-night; sleep well; and sleep off the day's excitements." He left the room hastily. Will restored the precious packet to his pouch undressed and slung it over his shoulder, and lay down upon it so that it could not be withdrawn without awakening him. It was not conducive to his comfort, but so great was his fatigue that he immediately fell asleep and slept without stirring for nine hours.

Friend meanwhile, smiling and pshawing to himself, went to bed with very mixed feelings.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN INTERVIEW WITH PITT

WILL reached Folkestone only to find that Pitt was still at Walmer, and had to journey on thither in order to fulfil his commission. He was bidden wait for a return message; and the next day was summoned to the Prime Minister's presence. Pitt looked disturbed and displeased.

"Do you know, young man," he said to Will, "that these despatches have been tampered with?"

"I had hoped they had remained unopened since the seals were unbroken," Will replied in a low voice. "I acknowledge I had the misfortune to lose them. I was robbed on my way down."

"You lost them! Robbed!" The mere voice was more terrible than a volley of reproaches.

"I assure you, sir, I guarded them with the most jealous care. They must have been taken from the pouch while upon me without my knowledge. They never left my person day and night, except for one half-hour when I placed them in the care of a most trustworthy friend, who remained under my eyes while I was bathing," confessed the too ingenuous Will.

"You had no right to allow them out of your care for a single second," said Pitt. "You seem to be very little aware of the gravity of your responsibilities, young man. Who and what was this trusted friend of yours?"

"Indeed, sir, 'tis impossible that suspicion can attach to him. I have my own idea as to the guilty party; I

may say I feel a practical certainty; but the condition of my recovery of the papers was that I should ask no questions; and as I believed that speed in delivering them safely into your hands was of prime importance, I was willing to postpone investigation until you should give your directions."

"And who is it you suspect, and why?"

"A certain well-known smuggler and violent character on Romney Marsh, a Mr. Jack Rangsley. I fell in with him on my way down, and incautiously betrayed to him my errand. It appears he has a grudge against Government on account of the interference with the smuggling trade due to the presence of so many troops along the coast. In my hearing he indulged in many treasonable sentiments, to which I took exception, and a quarrel was the result. I have very little doubt that out of revenge he robbed me, not so much with the idea of embarrassing the Government as of ruining me."

Pitt listened with great attention. "And how did you succeed in recovering the documents?" he asked.

"They were recovered for me by my friend and companion, the gentleman to whom I have alluded, Mr. John Friend," said Will. "It appears—I know nothing of his affairs—but it seems he has a friendship of old standing with—with more than one family in the neighborhood of Romney Marsh. He warned me he could answer no questions; but I have no doubt he brought his influence to bear on Mr. Rangsley and induced him to give up the packet."

"Then you think it was a freak of private malice, and of no political import at all?" inquired Pitt.

"Such is my belief. If I had had grounds for thinking otherwise, it would have been my duty to lay my suspicions before you, sir, when handing you the packet. I had hoped the papers were intact."

"It is obvious they have been opened and read, though

the thief was too cunning to destroy the seals; they have been carefully removed and replaced," said Pitt. "Your explanation is plausible, sir, but it hardly satisfies me. Who is this Mr. John Friend? Is he the man by chance I met at the Lewes Review last May?"

"I believe that would be the same, sir. He was staying in Brighton last May."

"I think I know the man. And pray how came you to be traveling in his company?"

"Mr. Friend is one of my closest and most trusted friends, sir. I owe everything to his kindness. When this important commission was intrusted to me I immediately told him of my good fortune. I may mention he is a close friend of Mr. Hunt, my superior at the Admiralty Office. As he had business down in Kent, he offered to ride with me, and I accepted his proposal with thankfulness."

"Did you ride alone with him?"

"No; Mr. Friend had a companion."

"Who and what?"

"—a—a friend," stammered Will, torn between his innate frankness and his fear of betraying a confidence; "the gentleman traveled under the name of Mr. David Morgan, but I believe his nationality was really—he was really a Frenchman. His business was purely private, I assure you, sir; but as he had put himself into considerable danger by his imprudence in coming to this country, Mr. Friend thought it best for him to travel in disguise."

"A Frenchman? Are you sure, sir? This is an extraordinary story. Are you aware that there was an alarm on this coast three or four weeks ago about a French spy who was known to have landed and who managed to escape arrest?"

"I had not heard of it, sir. This gentleman, Mr. Friend's companion, came from London."

"How long had he been there?"

"I am quite unaware, sir."

"My information reports that the spy is supposed to have escaped to London."

"I beg you to believe, sir, he could have had no connection with any friend of Mr. Friend's. He is a man of most unblemished honor and loyalty. I will answer for him with my life."

"I think you a little too willing to answer for your friends, Mr.—ah—North. Can you tell me where this Frenchman who is passing under the name of Mr. David Morgan is now?"

"He has left England, I believe, sir."

"Are you certain?"

"I may safely say so. Mr. Friend told me he had seen him off."

"When and where?"

"Four or five days ago, from Hythe."

"A nest of smugglers and traitors! Has Mr. Friend any connections at Hythe?"

"I am not aware, sir. I know nothing of his private affairs except what he has been good enough to tell me."

"What has he told you then of his Kentish connections?"

"I have seen he has a strong friendship for the family of a farmer called Rayner, at the village of Aldington; and he mentioned he had known Mr. Rangsley for some years."

"Is Mr. Friend connected with the smuggling trade?"

"I—I have no means of knowing," stammered Will. "I do not conceive it is my duty to pry into my friends' private affairs that they have not thought fit to confide to me."

"You are altogether too trustful and guileless for political affairs, Mr. North. The case looks to me rather black against Mr. Friend. I know something of him;

I do not conceive him likely to be a man of squeamish honor."

"I assure you, sir, that you are mistaken in your impression. I will answer for his honor with my life."

"H'm!" said Pitt dryly. "And are you equally ready to answer for this—this Mr. David Morgan's honor?"

"I know little of Mr. Morgan," replied Will. "I believe him to be a man of character and honesty, since he was introduced to me by my most revered and trusted friend; but of my own knowledge I could say nothing of his character. He gave me the impression of being an open, honorable man."

"Did he mention political subjects at all?"

"Not once. He showed absolutely no interest in them. In fact, he struck me as being a man of pleasure, and very unlikely to entertain any serious interests."

"Do you know how he reached England or how long he had been here?"

"Not at all."

"If you knew anything of the care with which our coasts are guarded at the present crisis, Mr. North, you could not fail to be struck with the improbability, the almost impossibility, of two Frenchmen having landed in so short a space of time."

"But I do not at all know that Mr. Morgan's arrival was recent, sir. He may have been—probably has been residing in this country for months."

"Then he would have papers."

"He may have had them for aught I know," replied Will boldly; "at least—I believe—I fancy Mr. Friend did acknowledge he had had the imprudence to come without them."

Pitt smiled dryly at the young man's extreme ingenuousness.

"You were certainly not formed by Nature for a politician, Mr. North," he said. "I fear you have

become the dupe of an exceedingly clever man. Your theory *may* be true; but I should be greatly surprised if this Mr. David Morgan does not turn out to be a French spy."

"I suppose it is possible that Mr. Friend, like other men, may occasionally be deceived in his friends' characters," replied Will; "but that he is absolutely ignorant and unsuspicious of anything dark or doubtful about Mr. Morgan's errand, I feel an absolute certainty. No more open, honorable, and candid soul than Mr. Friend ever stood in the light of day."

"Well, Mr. North, I must act on my own opinions. Your view may possibly chance to be the correct one; but I shall investigate the matter with the utmost care. In the meantime do not leave Walmer without express leave from me. These despatches must be answered; and if I find I have no need of your services in unraveling this affair of their theft, I will employ you to carry the replies; but I warn you against traveling in the company of any friend whatsoever on your return journey, and particularly against letting the nature of your errand become known."

Will, understanding he was dismissed, bowed and retired; feeling he had got off with less than he deserved.

Nothing reached his ears as to the steps which Pitt was taking to investigate the theft; but the more he thought of the matter, the more uneasy he became as to the consequences of his indiscretion. He saw that Friend, of whose innocence he remained convinced, would be placed in a very disagreeable position if Sauvignac were proved to be a spy, or even if the Government persisted in their suspicions. He resolved he must at all costs let him know his danger; although on their parting at Copperhurst Friend had warned him seriously to avoid the district of Romney Marsh for the future, telling him that if he were to fall a second time into

the smugglers' hands it was likely to go hard with him. He had no power to stir till Pitt should give him leave; and as the minister's inspection of the Cinque Ports took him from Walmer to Dover and from Dover to Folkestone, Will had to follow in his train, chafing at his inaction and his prolonged absence from Susan.

At the end of a week they were at Folkestone; and Pitt then made up his mind that nothing further was to be gained by keeping Will, made up, and handed to him the packet of answering despatches, and bade him be off to London without further delay.

In his anxiety for his friend, Will persuaded himself that he should not be disobeying his instructions if he were to halt at Copperhurst on his way; the necessary warning might be given in ten minutes. But on his arrival he found that Friend had returned to Hythe, and he could not make it anything but a flat breach of his orders to retrace his steps after him there. Mrs. Rayner, however, came to his assistance. "Why, my Bill's just going in to Hythe," she said; "you write a line to Squire Wood and send it by him."

"I don't know how to write as much as I want to say," said Will downcast; "to see him's what I want. I can't go myself; there's the chance of not finding him; and then my horse has cast a shoe, and I must take him to the blacksmith's."

"One of the lads shall do that for you, sir. Let Bill take a message, and ask the Squire to come up to-night or to-morrow morning. You can't be off to London before to-morrow, so there'd be time to see the Squire to-night if so be he's at home and Bill can get word o' him; and if not, ye must e'en say as much as ye can in the note. Sure a scholard like you can make it plain enough."

Will agreed it was the best course, and withdrew to compose a note. To express himself in writing was

always a slow and difficult process to him; but he finished at last, not greatly to his own satisfaction, and sent it off by Bill Rayner, who a couple of hours later delivered it as directed.

Friend was a good deal perturbed by this note, for awkwardly expressed though it was, it clearly indicated danger. He decided he must see and question Will himself. He was looking for Sauvignac's return at any moment; and he had promised his smuggling friends at Romney, who were deeply interested in the voyage of the *All's Well* and the landing of her cargo, to pass the night with them and give them all particulars of the plans for effecting it in defiance of the Revenue officers. His visit to them could not be put off, as it was to their co-operation and to the Rangseys that he chiefly trusted for mustering a sufficient force of men for his private purpose. He decided to leave a note for Sauvignac, to go to Romney as arranged, and to ride up thence to Copperhurst with the first light of day; and then, primed with all the information that Will could give him, to return to Hythe and regulate his proceedings and Sauvignac's according to the imminence of the danger. He wrote his message and left it in a sure hand for delivery to Sauvignac at the moment of his landing, and then rode off.

About nine o'clock that evening—it was the 4th of August—Sauvignac reached Hythe. He had gone straight to Napoleon at Fontainebleau, and had thence followed him to Boulogne on August the 3d; when, the Emperor's plans being matured as far as was possible in the absence of intelligence from his fleet, he was despatched back to Kent. News traveled slowly in those days. On his return from the West Indies the French admiral Villeneuve had fallen in with Sir Robert Calder some way off Cape Finisterre, and the engagement that followed had inclined to the advantage of the

English; whereupon Villeneuve, after an agony of indecision, decided to retire to Corunna, and thence a little later fell back to Cadiz. This skirmish with Calder, which really decided the fate of the projected invasion, took place on the 22d of July; but Napoleon was still in ignorance of it on his arrival at Boulogne, where every day he expected his fleet to make its appearance, and sent Sauvignac to tell his English agent to have all prepared for the descent in the course of the next week.

Sauvignac read Friend's note of warning with his usual light-hearted indifference to danger. Friend was not by him with his restraining hand; and a glorious idea darted into his head and filled him with mischievous glee. The theft of Will's letters had won him great encomiums from Napoleon. Now he learnt from Friend, there was North at Copperhurst, barely five miles distant, carrying doubtless the return despatches. He would steal up quietly after dark—most likely he would meet no one, and certainly would not be recognized—could easily effect an entrance into the old farmhouse, and would rob Will of the second packet. Of course it was a hazardous plan, but its foolhardiness only endeared it to him. If Will should wake and discover him, he would have no scruple in silencing him with a thrust from a knife. There was not much danger, after all, to a man who did not shrink from murder—when undertaken, be it understood, in the sacred cause of the Emperor. In that glorious service, what was the life of one insignificant foeman? He was prepared to sacrifice his own with equal light-heartedness. M. Sauvignac, far from being the mere man of pleasure Will thought him, was an enthusiast.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FIGHT ON ALDINGTON KNOLL

BETWEEN twelve and one at night, after he had snatched a couple of hours' sleep, Sauvignac set out on his expedition. He went on foot for greater silence and safety; but as it was a very dark and misty night and he not well acquainted with the road, he missed his way once or twice, and it was nearly four before he reached Copperhurst Farm. Even then he found the night mists and darkness so impenetrable that he was not able to explore for a way of entrance, and was obliged to wait for the first glimmerings of dawn. When they appeared, and the outlines of the buildings and the dark blots of doors and windows began to grow on his sight, he went round the house till he stood below Will's casement. It never occurred to him that his room might have been changed; his calculations were not of a nicety to consider such possibilities. It was as he thought; a low outbuilding below the window offered an easy access, and the window itself most conveniently and invitingly stood open.

There was no one about. Sauvignac thought he might as well wait till the light was stronger, and save himself the added risk of waking North with the rays of a lantern. The angle of the wall and a thick elderbush which brushed against the house would hide him if any early riser passed; in about half an hour he judged there would be light enough inside the chamber for his work.

When the time had passed he clambered lightly up to the roof, glanced round to see that no one was in sight, and squeezed himself cautiously in at the narrow window.

Fortune favored him. It was North who slept on the pallet bed. Sauvignac glanced sharply about for the papers, expecting to see the pouch that contained them among the clothes on the chair or hanging on the wall. He could not see it; he looked again at the sleeper and spied the strap of the wallet across his shoulder. He shrugged his shoulders; but he was not going to hold back now. He drew out his knife, ready to plunge it into North's throat at the slightest movement, and crept like a crouching cat towards the bed.

Suddenly, without a movement of warning, Will woke up. Some subtle sense of presence probably disturbed him. Without a sign or a sound he started broad awake. Sauvignac, who was not four feet away from him, saw his eyes open, and threw himself upon him in a flash. But Will had awakened with all his faculties alert; he started up as Sauvignac leapt, and seized the threatening knife with a clutch of iron. There was a desperate struggle. Sauvignac saw he had lost the throw; slighter in build and inferior in muscular power he was no match for North. After one frantic attempt to snatch the wallet from Will's shoulder he abandoned his aim and concentrated all his efforts on wriggling out of his grip. He had to let go his knife; he twisted and writhed like an eel; Will threw himself upon him, but he slipped out of his coat and escaped from his grasp. Overbalanced by the sudden withdrawal of his enemy, Will stumbled forward, and before he could recover himself Sauvignac was half out of the window. He jumped up and rushed at him, but too late; he was only in time to see him drop lightly to the ground and make off in the morning mist.

Half dazed, Will picked up the coat and sat down on the bed. His senses could not be playing him false. It was Mr. Morgan, who Friend had told him had sailed from England more than a week ago. It was Morgan; and what was he doing, attempting robbery in the first light of dawn? What interest had he in Pitt's despatches? With a groan Will admitted the truth that forced itself upon him: Morgan was, after all, the suspected French spy; Pitt was right; it was Morgan who had robbed him before. And Friend? But it was impossible that he should be anything but the deceived and betrayed, the honorable victim of the foreigner. Then how had he been able to recover the packet? Will put the thought from him with horror as something poisonous; and began to turn out the pockets of Sauvignac's coat. There was a silver spirit-flask in one, and in another a crumpled paper. Will smoothed it out and took it to the light. His heart stood still as he recognized Friend's writing.

"DEAR S." (it ran),—"An urgent message from young North calls me to Copperhurst. I shall be back by ten o'clock to-morrow morning. I fancy P—t may have taken the alarm; he could not miss seeing the packet had been opened. So keep absolutely quiet. I will make all further arrangements; don't you stir from the house; it is most important your presence should not be known. The affair is hanging by a thread; everything depends now on avoiding talk. Be careful.—Yours. "H. DUBOIS."

The signature meant nothing to Will, but the writing and the mention of his own name precluded any thought of mistake. He sat stupefied. The accursed thing was plain beyond all possibility of doubt. As he sat and thought, rage began to grow in his mind and gradually

displaced every other thought. How he had been duped! Doubtless it was Friend's own hand that had robbed him—yes, while he was bathing in the mill-pool in Poleshanger Wood. And the villain—the devil—had pretended to sympathize with him in his loss and had affected to help him to recover the papers!

Will sprang up, grinding his teeth with rage and thrusting at the air with Sauvignac's knife. He was beside himself with fury. Ah, he had written to the monster, who would no doubt be riding up from Hythe early in the morning; he would meet him and give him a reception he little looked for! He might be coming soon; he might even now be on his way. Will hurried into his clothes. It was fully daylight now. He would intercept him on the road and take him where they could settle their differences without interruption. Burning with lust of vengeance he hastened out of the house.

The morning was dull, but the thick mists of the night were beginning to disperse. Dewdrops hung from every leaf and every blade of grass. Will looked up the road and down; Friend would come westward from Hythe. He paced along the lane till he reached the highroad; but no one was in sight. He turned and went back to the farm, planning how he would lead Friend up to the quiet slopes around the Knoll, where the surrounding woods would hide them from observers. He waited for some twenty minutes, his anger concentrating itself and intensifying as he waited. The more he remembered how he had loved and idolized Friend, the more fiercely burnt his rage. Again he went up towards the highroad and returned; as he neared the house he saw a man on horseback approaching him up the road from the Marsh. It was Friend.

"Hullo, Will!" he exclaimed in his deep, mellow voice. "So you're ready waiting for me, eh?"

Will went to meet him and stopped his horse opposite

the gate that led into the field surrounding the Knoll. "Come in here," he said; "we can talk quietly here. I don't want to be interrupted."

Friend dismounted, threw the bridle over the gatepost, and turned into the field followed by Will. "Well, youngster, what's the matter?" he asked as they mounted the slope. Will would not reply. They reached the ridge, and Will motioned to go on down the further slope, to a corner of the field shut in by woods on two sides, and screened by the rocky mound of the Knoll from the road and house.

"Well, young man, what's the matter with you?" asked Friend again. "There's something wrong. What is it?"

"There *is* something wrong," said Will, suddenly stopping and facing him. "*You* are wrong, Mr. Friend. I have been making some discoveries about you."

"About me, lad? And what, pray, have you discovered about me?" The pleasant geniality vanished from his tone; there was a ring of hard mockery in his voice.

"I have discovered you to be a traitor, sir!" exclaimed Will, his passion leaping to the fore; "I have discovered you to be a false traitor to your country and to your friend! You have betrayed me—you and none other. You—you villain!"

"What's all this about?" asked Friend coolly. "What's all this nonsense?"

"No nonsense; I have proof. I would not have believed less than my own eyes; no mortal tongue could have made me believe it. Nay, who could have believed such devilish villainy—such execrable perfidy? Doesn't it exceed all belief?"

"I don't know what in the world you are talking about," said Friend contemptuously. "Will you please to explain yourself? And am I to understand that this

discovery, whatever it is, is the matter on which you sent for me?"

"No; I sent for you for your own sake, to serve you, to warn you. Up till this morning I had not a suspicion, not a doubt—they warned me of you in vain, and I would not believe them! But now you stand unmasked. I have your own hand to condemn you!"

"Will you kindly have the goodness to tell me what you're talking about? I can't understand one word," said Friend with an excellent assumption of scorn, though his color had somewhat paled.

"Villain, you understand me well enough. You are a traitor, sir! You and your friend Mr. Morgan are French spies; it was you who robbed me of my despatches before. And your friend has been at his tricks again this morning; he entered my chamber at dawn and attempted to rob me of the Government papers I carry. Fortunately for himself he escaped, but he left his coat in my hands, and in it I found—if his attempt was not sufficient evidence—a note from you which proves your complicity."

Friend did not speak for a moment. He was occupied in mentally cursing Sauvignac's folly and in a rapid review of the situation.

"And pray, what do you intend to do about it?" he asked at length, with unaltered composure and in the same scornful voice.

"Denounce you to the Government, of course—and obtain his arrest."

"And I am to wait here while you do it? No, my ingenuous young friend, you expect a little too much. My life is at stake;—and yours. Don't you understand, you fool?"

His hand had slidden down into his pocket; there was a click of which Will did not realize the import. He had begun to ask "It is a fight, then?" when he found

himself looking into the mouth of a pistol not three feet from his head. It was well for him that he had been trained in the ring, and that his fist was readier than his wits. Quicker than thought his arm shot out, and caught Friend on the shoulder as he fired. Friend staggered and the ball flew wide; Will was upon him with blow after blow; he dropped the pistol and turned to defend himself. Then Will found he had met his match. He showered in his blows as it seemed from all sides at once, but Friend met them everywhere with a guard he could not break. Quickness and activity were Will's strong points; he had overcome many a stronger man than himself by the bewildering rapidity of his attack; and here he had the advantage of three extra inches of height and a longer reach; yet not a blow could he get home. Meanwhile in his excitement he neglected his own guard. Friend seized his chance; he let out a tremendous sledge-hammer drive before which Will went down like a child.

Friend threw himself upon him as he fell. They rolled on the ground wrestling for mastery. Friend was the heavier and the stronger; Will had no chance in the grip of his mighty muscles. He struggled for dear life; sometimes for a moment he got uppermost, and strove with the fury of despair against the irresistible force that pressed him down again. His strength ebbed away in convulsive efforts; at every movement he found himself at a fresh disadvantage. His arms pinioned beneath him, exhausted and choking for breath, at last he gave in and lay motionless beneath his antagonist's knee. There was no sound but the quick hard panting of both.

Will was nearly bursting with chagrin. With his knowledge of fighting he knew he ought not to have fallen so easy a victim. It should have been an easy matter to him to avoid Friend's blow, quick on his

feet and long of arm as he was; but, beside himself with passion, he had lost his head and thrown away the fight like any novice. His vexation with himself took the form of fury with his opponent. He saw him slip his hand into a pocket and pull out a pistol. His heart beat frightfully. He could only glare in helpless rage; he was absolutely powerless.

"It is your life or mine," said Friend behind clenched teeth. "You die, or I hang."

He pulled the trigger—the pistol missed fire. He flung it from him and drew out a knife. He poised it over his victim's throat. Will shut his eyes, almost senseless with fright. He felt his skin creep as the knife touched—it lingered, tickling. The agony was unspeakable. Will recalled how he had faced the bullets of the Rangsleys without a tremor, and raged at himself for his inability to command himself now. What made the difference? Perhaps it had been the cruel, hostile faces surrounding him then that had stiffened his nerves—the faces that were watching eagerly for the least sign of weakness in order to gloat over it; and, moreover, the fact that among them there were women. And then he had been on his feet, bound and defenseless it is true, but erect and on a level with his tormentors—a man among men. Now he lay helpless on his back, pinned by inexorable strength, below a weight as resistless as if the whole mass of the Knoll were pressing him down. He was overpowered, done for. There was nothing to do but to lie and wait till the tickling knife should prick—and then with one sharp piercing pang should somehow effect that unthinkable separation, should remorselessly rend the indivisible life away from the warm palpitating body.

Still the stroke delayed. He opened his eyes. Friend hurled the knife away and exploded with a great oath. "Damnation! I can't!" he cried hoarsely. He with-

drew his knee and rose to his feet. "Get up, fellow; and take yourself off to the Devil as fast as you can," he said, kicking Will in the ribs. He went to pick up his knife and returned it to its sheath; then he sought for and replaced the two pistols. Will was nearly stifled with the beating of his heart; sick and trembling, he could not move.

Friend stood over him and looked at him for a second. "You're all right," he said. "You'll be on your feet again in half an hour. It's me that death has got by the throat now."

He strode away, and Will was left on the grass alone.

CHAPTER XX

THE INDIGNATION OF MONSIEUR SAUVIGNAC

FRIEND mounted his horse and rode off to Hythe, marveling at himself. By sparing Will he had given the lie to his whole life, had blasted the efforts of years. The attempt to understand his forbearance made his head reel, and in disgust and bewilderment he turned from it to consider the action before him. The first thing to be done was to provide for the safety of Sauvignac, who would be at his Hythe lodgings, but could not now remain there. He rode quickly and reached his rooms before seven o'clock, but the Frenchman had already left them. There was a little inn called "The Dog and Duck," the landlord of which was known as a safe friend to smugglers; he had taken Sauvignac there on his previous visit; and now decided to seek him there. The necessity was pressing; muttering a curse at having no time to stay, Friend dashed off again. He knew he was leaving various compromising papers to the authorities who would doubtless raid the rooms; but it never once occurred to him to abandon Sauvignac. He could not afford to lose a minute. "The fellow is no more fit to go about this business alone than a child of two," he muttered angrily to himself; "the idea of playing the fool like this at such a moment! And for such a trifle—what did the blasted letters matter? He's brought us both to the gallows with his harebrained tricks."

Half an hour of hard riding brought him to "The Dog and Duck," and there to his relief was Sauvignac. He ordered breakfast, and joined him.

"Well, monsieur; here's a pretty mess that you've got us into," he said.

"Ah, so you have heard of my little escapade? A pity it turned out so unsuccessfully. I thought I should do a fine stroke for the cause."

"And instead of that you've ruined us all," said Friend, cutting a liberal helping of cold beef.

"I am glad to see your prospective ruin does not affect your appetite," returned Sauvignac.

"I don't know when I am likely to get another meal, and I seem as safe here now as anywhere," replied Friend. "You'd better join me, Sauvignac. The dickens knows when we shall eat next. We've got to fly for our lives."

"How so? What new has happened?"

"Why, young North has recognized you, and found my note in your coat pocket (why the deuce did you stuff it in there instead of burning it?) and if off hot-foot to denounce us both. He sees the whole game now."

"How do you know? How have you found out?"

"I've seen him this morning. He wrote, you know, to tell me to come up, saying Pitt's suspicions were roused. He'd something else to say by the time we met; it was a denunciation, not a warning, he had ready for me when I got to Copperhurst. We ought to be grateful to him for waiting to tell me of his kind intentions first. Any one else would have gone to the magistrate before he taxed me with treachery."

"You met him, and heard his plans, and let him go?"

"Yes, I did. I made him a present of my life, and yours, and all the Emperor's chances that lay in my hands—and made him a bow and rode away."

"Are you then mad?"

"If you like."

"But—but what happened? Did you not fight? Were you overpowered?"

"No. We fought and I got the better of him. I had my knee on his chest, my knife at his throat. I should have done the job if my pistol had not failed me; I pulled the trigger, but it missed fire. I stopped there. When it came to the knife——" He broke off. The unaccountableness of his action overcame him. It produced a feeling of unreality in his mind; he did not know himself.

"You turned fool—you spared his life, with our secret and our lives in his hand? You gave up our Emperor's cause for a scruple?"

"I never felt a scruple in my life," said Friend, making an effort to recover himself. "But my knife's my own. I did as I chose."

"You had no right to choose!" cried Sauvignac. "You are the Emperor's man, not your own. The conquest of England is at stake!"

Friend muttered something that sounded like a curse on the Emperor.

"What am I to make of you, Dubois?" pursued the Frenchman. "Have you forgotten for whom you work? You say you have no scruples; why then do you hang back? Is not our cause the most glorious in the world? It ennobles us all who work in it; a man may fitly give his life and all that he has for this. I have thought you happy that you have a country you can sacrifice for the Emperor; you have made that sacrifice; you have rid yourself of all scruples, and yet you hang back now? Think who it is you work for."

"That's all very fine for you; but my point of view is different," said Friend. "I don't care for your Emperor. He has paid me well; that's all I want of him."

But there are things it seems money can't pay for," he concluded meditatively, dropping his voice.

"Can't pay for! Money! Are these your motives? I do not believe it of you, Dubois. It is impossible. Men like you do not betray their country for money. It is because you have seen and known my Emperor for what he is,—one born to be the master of the world."

"Damn your Emperor," said Friend. "I care nothing for him; no more than I do for poor old lunatic George, or Pitt and all his cobwebs. The man who pays me best is the man for me; the man who offers me the most intricate task and the highest reward. If I'd been born a Frenchman I should have sold your blasted Emperor to Pitt."

"You curse the Emperor to my face?" cried Sauvignac, laying his hand on his sword-hilt. "Wretch, you shall die for this!"

"Don't draw your sword, Sauvignac," said Friend coolly. "As you see, I have not mine. I apologize for the curse; it was quite unnecessary."

The two men gazed fixedly at each other.

"If you apologize," growled Sauvignac at length, "I can say no more. You wish to make a fool of me, I see. But come, let us stop this joking. What steps can still be taken? We must consider that. Can we not waylay him yet? How long is it since he started?"

"It is no use pursuing him. It was not six o'clock when I left him. The matter will be in the hands of the magistrates by now."

"We must pursue him. We may catch him yet; and what can the magistrates do without his evidence? Dubois, he must die. It is necessary. Come, man! Which way did he go?"

"It is no use, I tell you. If it were—if we could catch the lad and hold him safe till the affair is over, I'd be with you, for I've no particular wish to be hanged;

but it is too late now. He's on the road to London by this time, or closeted with the authorities at Hythe."

"If you knew which! We might stop him yet. We are two. Come, Dubois! Where are your wits? You have saved us in many a more difficult strait than this. You, so ready of plan, so full of resource! Wake up, man, and say what we had better do. Remember your own life is at stake."

"I have lost the throw already," said Friend. "I am fey, I think—as the Scotch call it. I can see nothing to do." He spoke absently, almost as if in a dream. Sauvignac gazed at him in astonishment.

"But think, man! How can we stop him? He may have been seen on the road. We can inquire at the Rayners'; he will certainly have told them."

"And how can we show ourselves there if he has?"

"We will not show ourselves. Leave it to me; I can manage it. I have a friend there on whom I can rely; a private signal to the lovely Dolly, and she will meet me secretly and tell me all she knows. It will be quite safe; quite safe. Oh, leave that to me, *mon cher*. I will arrange it."

"You don't go to the Rayners' house again," said Friend determinedly.

"And why not? When it is our only chance? What do you mean?"

"What I mean is that I'd rather see you hanged than stealing private meetings with Dolly. The Rayners are good friends of mine, and I'll not see their daughter ruined."

"Their daughter ruined! Absurd! Madness! As if I should think of love when things are as serious as this!"

"You have done enough mischief there already. You shall not go again to make the girl miserable for life."

"Imbecile! Lunatic! To think of girls and such

follies now! What are ten thousand girls to our affair? —I see how it is; you want her for yourself.”

“You’re the lunatic now. Look here, Sauvignac, ride after North if you like; he’ll probably take the London road; I’ll help you, as long as you spare his life, if you will give me your sacred word of honor never to see Dolly Rayner again.”

“There speaks the jealous lover! I thought I should find you out some day, my fine fellow! So this is it; the scorner of women, the man of austere morals, has been carrying on an intrigue in this quiet corner with pretty Dolly Rayner!” Only he used a word for which “intrigue” is no adequate translation.

“You are quite wrong,” said Friend coolly. “It’s the family I care for; not the girl.”

“And he boasts of his morals and sets up to be a pattern to youth and would keep his young friend in the path of virtue!” cried Sauvignac with bitter disgust. “Hypocrite! I suspected you with your strait-laced airs all along. Now I have found you out. And you pose as a friend to the parents. Vile hypocrite! You make me proud of my own character; an open libertine like I am is a saint beside you.”

“You are absolutely wrong,” said Friend. “I detest a hypocrite as much as you do; there’s none of that in me. Have you no eye for men, man? Can’t you believe in some being different from yourself?”

“Thank heaven I am different from you,” returned Sauvignac, hotly as ever. “I am no traitor to boast of my sordid motives, to damn the hand that feeds me, and desert my master at the critical moment. I thought I had a comrade in you; I was mistaken. You are unworthy of the confidence of a gentleman. Our ways part here.”

“Stop a minute, Sauvignac. We cannot part yet. We must discuss what we can yet save from the fire,

and what to do for our own necks. If you fall into the Government's hands, all's up indeed. The first thing to do is to get you across in safety."

"The first thing to do is to stop North. Curse it, it may yet be done. With better horses we may overtake him; and we have the money. Will you join me in this, Dubois? You take one road and I the other. If you will aid me to waylay and silence North, I will endeavor to forget what has passed."

"I will, on condition that his life is spared."

"His life spared! Madness! Nothing but his death can make us safe."

"His life shall not be touched with my consent," repeated Friend. "Call it what you please; I'm a lunatic if you like: but if it comes to a choice between the Emperor Napoleon and young Will North, why, I throw up my cap for the youngster."

"You dare to say so? To my face? You are a villain and a traitor, Dubois. Draw your sword, man; I am going to kill you."

"My sword's at Hythe," said Friend. "I have pistols at your service if you are really serious; but I think you're a fool. You can get no good by killing me, and you'll make yourself an infinity of trouble. How are you going to deal with the Hythe men without me? Come, man, give over; I've no wish to injure the cause; I'm willing to do all I can for it yet if you promise not to harm North. All's not lost. North knows nothing about the *All's Well*. Our lads will still be on the beach as arranged to run the cargo, and they'll fall in with the military there; if you and I can only save our necks and our papers all may go on well without us. But if we are caught, all's up indeed."

"It is true we must not be taken. But to leave so delicate a job to chance! Dubois, you are a traitor. To wreck so fine a scheme for a miserable sentiment!

But I cannot catch North alone. I have no help for it; we must look now to ourselves. Lead on; you go, I suppose, to Hythe. I must trust you, though you do not deserve it. Some day I may be able to give you your deserts. To-day I must look to you to get me out of the country."

"We'll have a try; but I can promise nothing," said Friend. "We can't show ourselves in Hythe; that'll be the first place to be roused. We must give up the papers; I had no time to dispose of them. If they seize them, as they are pretty sure to do, it'll go devilish hard with me if I am taken. We'll make for Dymchurch; we may find a boat there to put us across."

They finished their meal, and rode down to Dymchurch. The Marsh was very lonely, and they passed no one on the road but a small boy driving a cow. No boat was to be had. The fishermen were all out at sea; the village was almost deserted. They rode on westward. Once a party of soldiers passed at a trot without noticing them. "They are going to warn the coast, depend upon it," said Friend.

To the west of Dymchurch a long stretch of coast extends, flat, barren, and dreary, all the way to Dungeness. There are few houses in the region to this day; then there were fewer still. They passed but one hovel where a boat was drawn up on the beach. Friend inquired if the master would take them across in it; but was told he lay sick of the ague. "What think you, Morgan?" said Friend. "Could we two manage the boat? Will you hire her to us, dame?"

But the woman flatly refused. They needed the boat, she said; besides, she has no mast. Without a sail the thing was impossible. They rode on. They came to the hamlet where now New Romney stands. There were but three or four miserable cottages clustered round

the inn. Friend rode up to it; a clean new bill was glistening on the doorpost.

"£500 Reward for the Apprehension of the Body of one John Friend, alias Henry Wood, alias Dubois; also of one François Sauvignac, alias David Morgan," looked him in the face.

"So they've billed us already," he said coolly to Sauvignac. "Young North's not such a fool as I took him for after all. He's gone straight to Hythe. It was a good move of his."

"There'll be a hue and cry after us directly," said Sauvignac.

"Yes. If we can't get a boat here we'll go for the night to Romney. I know a place there where we should be safe. But we must get off by this tide if we can."

No boat, however, could be had; and they rode inland to Romney. Friend tapped cautiously at a back door with his riding-whip. A footstep was heard, and the door opened a crack; Friend gave the watchword, "Snuff and Enough." On that the door was opened, and they were led into a back kitchen or wash-house.

"Well, Carter, we're in trouble; the bloodhounds are after us," said Friend. "Can ye hide us for a while? Will any boat be going out next tide or so?"

"We can hide you a while, Squire, and welcome; but there's no boat going to-night. There's one to-morrow, if she's not over-full already; she's taking a crew out to the *Jumping Joan* o' Hastings; they might be able to crowd one o' you in. I doubt if they could manage both."

"If not both, then one must go," said Friend. "Morgan, it must be you; I can shift for myself better than you. I know every hole and corner along this coast; when you're once off my hands I shall be all right."

"I cannot go and leave you in danger," said Sauvignac.

"You can only double my danger by staying," replied Friend. "Perhaps after all they'll be able to take us both. I wish we could get off to-night; but we can't afford to be particular. Thank 'ee, Carter, you're a true friend in need. We can lie snug enough in your cellar if you'll give us a bite and a sup to keep the life in us. The trapdoor is behind here, isn't it?"

They pushed aside a great oaken press or cupboard; it moved easily without a sound. Beneath it, carefully sanded over, a trapdoor was disclosed and opened, from which a ladder led down into a vast vaulted cellar. Sauvignac and Friend descended. "Here we shall be safe, though all Romney Marsh were as thick with red-coats as it is with reeds," said Friend.

"My faith, the lodging is not sumptuous," said Sauvignac, glancing at the walls which glistened with damp. The great cellar was empty save for one or two casks in a corner. Their host brought them provisions and a bundle of straw on which to sleep. It was not yet three in the afternoon; and when they had eaten the time passed slowly enough. They dared only converse in the lowest tones for fear of being overheard. Sauvignac kept up his spirits well; he made jokes and hummed amatory songs under his breath. Friend, though not so gay, was cheerful and composed again as usual. He did all he could for the comfort of his companion; he took the dampest side of the cellar for himself, and the scantest share of straw, when at last it grew dark and they lay down to sleep. The air struck chill as the night wore on, and Sauvignac kept waking and muttering half-audible curses on the cold. At last he slept on with a sensation of warmth and comfort, and only woke in the morning to find himself covered with Friend's coat. Softened by the perception of his generosity, he forgot his wrath, and they became once more excellent comrades.

The next day passed heavily away, each hour dragging itself more slowly than the last. At about nine o'clock they emerged, and went down to the coast to meet the boat. There were ten men already in her. They demurred a good deal about taking another passenger; Friend talked to them persuasively and urgently, and promised a large reward.

"D—n you, waste no more time," said one at last impatiently. "We ought to ha' started a quarter-hour ago. Let your man get in if he's coming."

At the last minute Sauvignac was smitten with a scruple. "You risk your life to save mine, Dubois," he cried. "There is but one chance between us, and you give it to me! Never will François Sauvignac redeem his life at the expense of his friend's! Go you; I stay."

"Nonsense, man!" cried Friend indignantly. "Get in and don't waste precious time."

"Now, then, is the gentleman coming? 'Cause we can't wait no longer," said the man who had refused to take them.

"Go you; go, my friend, and save thyself. I remain; it is fixed," said Sauvignac. He stood immovable. The men dipped their oars; the boat moved out. Friend stooped and rushed at Sauvignac, struck him violently behind the knees so that he fell backwards, hoisted him over his shoulder, and dashed up to the waist into the water. He seized the boat just before it passed out of reach, and pitched Sauvignac in, helpless as a sack of flour. A roar of laughter and curses greeted this feat. The men bent to their oars, and the boat shot out over the sea.

CHAPTER XXI

THE EARTHS ARE STOPPED

“AND now,” said Friend to himself as he stood alone and dripping on the beach, “this part of the world is decidedly too hot to hold me, though my sensations at this minute would not precisely suggest it. I’ll strike northward, and beat the Thames coast from Thanet to Gravesend; and it’s odd if I can’t find a vessel to carry me out. I’m too well known down here, and that’s the truth.”

Soaked to the skin from the waist downward, on foot and in the darkness, Friend set out. He soon walked off the chill of his wetting. When day came he hid in a haystack, and continued his journey by night. For all the following day, and for the next; for the succeeding day, and for a fourth, and a fifth, and a sixth, Friend trudged along the shore of the Thames estuary, questioning, seeking, looking in all directions for escape and finding none. He dared not show himself in the larger ports where the military were on guard and every one stood on the alert; in the smaller hamlets a vessel was hard to find, and the inquiry at once roused suspicion. Quick as his brain was, he was sorely taxed to invent plausible explanations of his business. His clothes, stained and shrunk with weather, were wearing out; fatigued, and harassed in spite of himself with anxiety, he no longer presented an appearance to inspire confidence. His money, too, was dwindling fast. He had in his possession bank bills to a large amount; but

of what avail were they to him when he could not cash them? His position was growing desperate.

"It seems to me the earths are stopped," he murmured to himself. "I must back to London. It is, after all, the safest place in the world for a man who wants to disappear. I will rest and refit; and then have a try in the West."

Mrs. Friend had been in bed for some hours when she was aroused by a gentle pertinacious tapping below. She peered through the window but could see nothing; it sounded as if some one was knocking softly on the area door. She went down to see, trembling as she did so, partly from apprehension of robbers, for she was very nervous and sorely subject to fanciful terrors; and partly from the vague but ever-present strain of anxiety with regard to her husband under which she lived. She cautiously unbolted the door and peeped out. As soon as she opened it Friend slipped into the house.

"Well, Polly, my little woman, here I am again!" he exclaimed in very low tones, clasping her in his arms.

"My dearest! This is joy! . . . But how worn and tired you look!" she exclaimed when he at last released her.

"Yes, Polly, I have had a pretty hard time. Come upstairs and I'll tell you. Be quiet, my love; no one must know I'm in the house."

Her heart sank with the presentiment of evil. They went upstairs, and he locked the door of the bedroom.

"Are you hungry?" she asked. "Shall I get you something to eat?"

"No, love, thank you. I'll wait till morning. I'm all right now I'm at home. Polly, it is good to be at home with you again!" He threw himself into the high-backed armchair.

"You are tired out, my love. And oh, look at your clothes! And your boots! . . . Friend, you are in danger."

"Don't concern yourself about that, my dear," said Friend easily, preventing her as she would have taken off his boots for him. "I'll do that, love. Put me out a suit ready, will you, and some clean linen? I've not had my clothes off for a week. Ah, but I'm weary, and it's good to be at home!"

"Here are your things, but you do not want them now? You will surely go to bed and sleep?"

"Yes, dear; but I must have all ready for the morning. I must make an early start, before any one is up. Let no one know I've been home, Polly."

Her heart felt like lead in her breast as she heard him. "You are in danger, Friend," she repeated.

"Oh well, love, that's nothing new," he laughed. "I'm always more or less in danger. It needn't spoil your night's rest, dearest."

"But this is something new," she urged. "Tell me, my love. Is it the law? Is there a warrant out against you?"

"That's it, dearest. But never mind, Polly. There's a vast difference between having a warrant out against you and being taken."

The difference was not so obvious to Mrs. Friend, who shrank more from the act that had caused the issue of the warrant than from any penalty.

"Friend," she said, "what have you done?"

Friend was washing himself as she spoke, and made no reply. He heard well enough, however, and had to consider rapidly if he could keep the truth from her. It was no use, he concluded. Unless he were to desert his home altogether, she must know the danger he stood in. He splashed more noisily than was absolutely prudent, and prolonged his ablutions to put off the evil

moment. But as soon as he had finished she faced him with the question again.

"Well, my dear," he said; "I dare say you may have guessed that I've had a good deal to do with French affairs for the last few years."

"I know," she said, shrinking.

"And at this crisis, you know, Polly, to have to do with French affairs is a very dangerous position for a man. In fact, if it gets known, it's his ruin. And, unfortunately, a note of mine to a friend on the other side fell into young Will North's hands. He has taken it to the authorities, and they have issued a warrant against me."

"What then was in the note?" she asked breathlessly. He hesitated.

"Well—it was a mere note—but it showed him my game right enough. If it were only that—but I'm sorely afraid they have got hold of other papers, still more compromising. Can't you understand, Polly?"

"Do you mean—" she asked slowly—"do you mean that you were in league with the French Emperor—that you have been serving Bonaparte?"

He nodded. "You are right, my love. And if they can make out their case—as with the help of those papers they will be able to do—it's like to go hard with me if I'm taken. But never fear, Polly; I'm not going to be taken."

"O Friend!" she exclaimed. "What does that matter? That you should have turned against your country—that you should be a traitor—that is the horror of it!"

"Why, isn't one country just as good as another?" said Friend airily. "I don't see why I am bound to favor England more than France. England has never done anything for me that I'm aware of. This prate of

nationality seems all humbug to me, Polly. What's England? What's France? Mere geographical names—abstract ideas. There's no sense in all you good people running mad and killing each other for the sake of a name."

"It's not that. It's loyalty to those who have benefited you—truth to those who have trusted you."

"And who has benefited or trusted me, Polly? You dress up everything in such high-sounding romantic names, little woman. I'm for plain matter-of-fact. I can make far more money by serving the Emperor than the poor old lunatic on the throne here: so I give my loyalty to France. It seems to me it's perfectly simple and straightforward."

She moaned with distress, loathing his sophistry, but unable to think of arguments with which to confute it.

"Then why," she exclaimed suddenly, springing up and facing him fiercely, "why didn't you tell me years ago you were a Frenchman in your heart? I would have joined you then; I would have helped you. What are countries to me compared with you?" A vivid memory shot through her of the view of the French people she had received from her meeting with Fox. "A Frenchman may be loyal to his cause, I suppose. You would have been able then to have served your adopted country honestly."

"But I couldn't have been of the slightest service so, my dear. Don't you see? It was just my position here as Pitt's agent——"

"Don't, don't!" she cried. "Traitor! Base! Have you no sense of honor?"

"Well, my love, it's of no use discussing it. Frankly speaking, I don't believe in honor and all those fine-sounding names. They're just humbug. You see my position. I am searched for; and if I'm taken it's death. I've been trying to get out of the country for

the last week; every cranny on the coast is being watched; fortunately I got Sauvignac off. My only chance now is to lie hid for a time, and make my way down into Wales or somewhere in the West where I can take ship to Ireland. Or if I could get down to Devonshire or Cornwall I might get across to the Channel Islands and so to France. But for this I must have money. I must get a bill changed; and I'm dead tired. I'll have a rest, and be off early in the morning."

"Take me with you, dearest! Where you go, I must go. Whatever is to be your fate, I must share it."

"You, Polly? Why, my dearest, you could not stand the hardships for an hour. And besides, you know, it's exactly twice as difficult for two people to disappear as one."

"Well. I will not add to your danger. But send for me, love, as soon as you can. I have no life but yours; and whether it be exile, or any shame, or death itself, I must be at your side."

"My Polly! We'll share bright days together yet, little woman. I'll raise you as high as any woman in Europe."

She shook her head. "Never, dearest."

"Keep up your heart, Polly. I've as many wiles as a fox. They little know John Friend who think he's done for at the sight of a warrant."

"It is not that, my love. It is not your danger. . . . But come, we'll talk no more. You must go to sleep now. You need all the rest you can get."

"Kiss me, Polly, first."

She bent over him; they kissed long.

"How is it, Polly, that it's just for your goodness I love you, when I'm what I am myself? To come back to you, after some folks I've seen lately, is like coming back to clean cold water after drinking at ditches. I believe you never think a thought that isn't worthy of

a saint; and yet you love me. I wonder whether you don't despise me in your heart?"

"O husband!" she groaned. "Why do you say that? You know I have never concealed what I thought of you. But if you have given me cause to despise you, you have given me such cause to love you that I can be conscious of nothing else. Whatever you are, my husband, whatever you have done, you are the first and best and dearest of men to me."

"Ah! You deserved a better husband, Polly."

"There could have been none for me but you. You are all my life. Go to sleep, dearest."

He obeyed. She sat beside him, meditating on their last words. "Does it not help one to understand," she thought, "the nature of the Divine love, which can see our vileness so clearly, and yet love us none the less—nay, rather, all the more?" Her thoughts passed into prayers. Rapt in the mystic's dreams, she watched by her husband till the morning.

He woke early and was astir at once. "Now, my love, I must leave you," he said. "I must disappear for the day, and lie hidden until I can get my bills changed; and then take the first chance of getting off to the West. If I can manage it, I'll come back for the night, as long as no one suspects I've been here. Is Susan still away?"

He had suggested in a letter to his wife that Susan should be sent to an old servant in the country for a change of air and scene; and Mrs. Friend, shrinking and conscious in her sight from her knowledge of the deceit that had been practised on her, had been glad to carry out the plan.

"Yes, she is still away. I have not seen the dear child this fortnight."

"All right. So much the better. And you'll not let the maids know?"

"I'll try and let them have no suspicion. You will tap at the door as you did last night?"

"Yes, between twelve and one. Look out for me. If I'm not here by one, go to bed and don't wait longer; I shan't be coming."

"Very well, dearest."

"Look here, Polly," he said, struck with a sudden thought. "Whom have you in the house? What servants, I mean?"

"Only Betty and Sally, my love; and the boy Jacky who comes in at nine to clean the boots and shoes."

"Well, send Sally away for a holiday to-morrow; any excuse will do; and give Jacky an errand—some parcel to take to Susan, for instance. Betty is trustworthy, and will ask no questions if you give her a hint. Then I need not hurry away; I can stay here all day. I won't be seen; and I shall be as safe here as anywhere. I've a wearing time in front of me, and may as well rest while I can."

"Won't you stay to-day, my love? I can send Sally out. No one knows you are here."

"No, love, I must go now. I have business to do. I must get money; and there are papers I must burn, and other matters to be seen to. Good-by, little dearest. Keep up your heart. I'll balk them yet, never fear."

"Good-by, my beloved. God in His mercy keep you from all evil!"

They embraced, and softly went downstairs. Noiselessly he unbolted the door and slipped out into the empty street. She replaced the bolts and chains and returned to her room.

The day dragged slowly to an end. She sat and thought of her beliefs and ideals, outraged by her husband; of the king she prayed for with fervor every week; of the country she loved with a personal devotion; of the nation that stood to her for the highest

virtue, the widest freedom, the moral standard most acceptable to God. Everything she most revered he had defied. She felt—sharing his name and his life, as she still must wish to share them—that she was exiled from all she loved; accursed by her countrymen; excommunicated from her church. For how could she join in its services and utter the customary prayers, knowing as she now knew that her husband was scheming for its downfall?

Mrs. Friend was not naturally narrow-minded; but like all women and most men of her time she had been trained to distrust and despise all that was foreign or unfamiliar. Her husband's crime in her eyes was not mere treason; it was blasphemy. Yet this was not the worst of her burden. She could have borne this, borne it even with gladness, had it been possible to think of his motives with respect.

She had put away his clothes and destroyed all traces of his presence. No one had heard either his coming or his going. Night came at last. To avoid suspicion she went to her room at the usual hour; but sat up there waiting for his signal. She had sent away Sally, the second maid; and Betty slept at the back of the house. At a little past twelve came the gentle tap at the area door. She went downstairs and let him in.

During his wanderings Friend's beard had grown, and he would not shave it off as it served as a disguise. He brought with him now a pair of false eyebrows and a peruke which altered his appearance considerably. He tried them on before the glass, and turned round to her, laughing, for her approval. She turned away sick at heart; the thought of a disguise overpowered her with shame.

She had slept a little during the day; she could not sleep now. The night passed heavily away. About

six o'clock she rose; Friend was still sleeping soundly. She thought of what she should say to Betty; whether she should try to keep her in ignorance, or whether it would be safer to confide to her. She expected every minute to hear the maid stirring; but there was no sound in the silent house. Betty had overslept herself. Mrs. Friend thought of going to rouse her, as she would have done under ordinary circumstances; but she could not bring herself to face her. She dreaded inexpressibly what lay before her—the part she might have to play to save her husband's life. Friend had quite easily indicated to her a path of lies and deceit at which she shuddered; yet she knew she would take it. It was not the actual falsehood that appalled her; it was to find herself in league against the law, against the authorities she revered; supporting treason; defending the wickedness she loathed. Yet all this she felt with horror she was about to do.

At last, at twenty minutes to seven, Betty came down, muttering and grumbling to herself in a temper at being so late. Still Friend slept undisturbed. His wife waited, listening anxiously to the sounds of household work, till it was time to descend to breakfast. She had been wondering desperately how it was possible to take him a meal without Betty's knowledge. It could not be done, she decided. The maid stood over her like a dragon and insisted on pouring out her tea. "You'll be ill again, ma'am, and that I can see; I'd wager my thimble now, you've not slept a wink all the blessed night."

"Betty," said Mrs. Friend. "Betty. We are in trouble. We can trust you."

Betty's honest red countenance turned white; more through sympathy with the terror and anguish in her mistress's face than from her words. "O ma'am, what is it?" she cried.

"Your master is upstairs. No one must know he is here. He—he may be arrested, Betty."

"Is it for debt, ma'am? Oh, I would not distress myself for that!"

"Not for debt, Betty. Worse. Much worse. Don't ask me. We must not let it be known that he is at home. Will you take him up some breakfast?"

As she spoke a knock sounded on the house door. Betty cast a glance of comprehension and reassurance on her mistress, and ran out of the room to answer it. There was a sound of voices and a tread of heavy feet. Men were in the hall. Betty burst into the room, followed by three or four men in uniform. "It's the police, ma'am!" she cried. "I've told them master aren't at home."

The officer in command apologized for his errand, but told her it was his duty to search the house. He showed her a warrant for the arrest of John Friend, *alias* a whole string of names.

"You know he is not at home?" she said very quietly. It was upon her now, and she intended to lie with all her might; but she felt it would be her death. She was astonished at the calmness of her voice.

The man requested her keys. Feeling perfectly cold and as if she could not move, she handed them to him. She was in the act of doing so when Friend himself entered the room. With an ease at which half her mind stood incredulous she rose and greeted him like an acquaintance. "O Mr. Wilkinson, how do you do? Charmed to see you so early; only, you see, a troublesome engagement is claiming me just now. I fear we shall not be able to practise our duet on the harpsichord this morning." She believed the devil inspired the ready lie.

No one was quicker in grasping a situation than Friend. "I apologize, madam, for my unseasonable

intrusion, and trust I may find you at liberty in the afternoon," he replied with a bow, and was retiring when the sergeant placed himself in front of the door. "I think the gentleman had better not leave the house till our investigation is concluded," he said.

"Why, what's this?" said Friend; and in the same breath his wife exclaimed, "Why, you would not detain the gentleman, surely? This is Mr. Wilkinson, sir, a neighbor of ours, who is kind enough to divert my solitude in Mr. Friend's absences with practising music with me. You can have no right to detain him, surely?"

The men glanced at each other but did not move. "The gentleman cannot leave the house at present," repeated the sergeant, bending a suspicious eye on Friend. He felt the game desperate, and tried to carry it with bluster. "Come, come, you mustn't stop me; my time's of value," he said, pushing past the opposing constable. . . . "Guard the door, Wilson!" cried the sergeant, and a subordinate set his back against it, while at the same instant, "It is our man!" shouted another. Friend seized the man at the door by the shoulders and flung him to the ground, but before he could turn the handle three of them had thrown themselves upon him and dragged him back. An instant of furious struggling and Friend stood clear again; before his assailants could arise he had drawn out and cocked a pistol and made for the door. He had not reached it when they were on him again; a flash and report smote his wife's senses, and a man staggered back groaning. With a shriek she threw herself upon her husband. "Let go, Polly! You fool, let go! Don't you see my life's at stake?" cried Friend. As gently as he could—but she clung so tight he was obliged to use force—he cast her off, felled another of his foes with his left arm, and forced his way to the door. The wounded man shouted for help. The door was already

open when the sergeant threw himself in the way ; Friend leveled his second pistol at his head, but again his wife rushed upon him and seized his arm. "No, Friend, no!" she screamed. "Not murder! O my God, not a murderer!" For an instant he struggled with her, but she held on, shrieking frantically. Suddenly her forces failed her and she dropped to the ground. He caught at her, his weapon falling unheeded, as the three constables seized him; she had swooned. More men were rushing in from the hall. He threw off those who held him and lifted his wife, carried her to a sofa, and laid her gently down. Then he turned to the police who filled the room and held out his hands for the handcuffs. "Take me where you like, gentlemen," he said, "I am quite at your service now."

CHAPTER XXII

AT BOULOGNE

ABOUT the same time a short stout man in a long greatcoat, whose group of attendants kept respectfully behind him, was restlessly pacing the cliffs of Boulogne, and stopping every now and then to sweep the horizon to the west with his telescope. It was the Emperor Napoleon. All was prepared for the invasion of England. His troops lay ready to embark at a moment's notice. Not only Boulogne, but all the smaller ports in the neighborhood, were crammed with his soldiers. The flat-bottomed boats lay ready to put to sea; the last preparations were made; the explosion waited only for the match. Since August the 3d he had been at Boulogne, eagerly expecting news from his fleet or from his English spies. As day after day passed and the sails of Villeneuve's ships still did not appear, he began to make up his mind to stake everything on Friend's scheme; to trust to darkness and favorable weather for eluding the English fleet and escaping the notice of their cruisers, and to cross the Channel without waiting for the protection of his men-of-war. Time pressed; a storm threatened in Austria and the east of Europe; he longed to strike a deadly blow at England before he should be called away to wage a Continental war in Germany.

He reviewed the immense preparations for the invasion; he exhorted his soldiers by the title of "The

Army of England"; he inflamed them with invectives against the treachery and arrogance of their ancient foe, and told them they were now about to humble the pride of their rival, and roll the purse-proud islanders in the dust. Indoors he took from its case a medal, bearing his own classical profile, beautiful as the young Augustus, on the one side, and on the reverse a figure of Hercules crushing the sea-monster, with the words *Descente en Angleterre. Frappée à Londres, 1804*. "It is only to alter the date," he muttered. "This time it shall be accomplished!"

"The tides will be favorable in three days' time, and for six nights only," he meditated. "Why does not this rascal of a Sauvignac appear? What can delay him? From Wednesday until Monday, given a dark night and a calm sea, it could be done, fleet or no fleet, were the landing only secured. If Dubois has only carried out his plan I will risk it whether Villeneuve comes or not; he cannot delay long enough to imperil our communications."

At last Sauvignac arrived, and, according to instructions, was taken instantly to the Emperor. He looked worn, haggard, and anxious.

"Well, sir?" said Napoleon. "What news have you? Is all prepared for our landing—the smugglers ready to fight?"

"Alas, Emperor!"

"What are you alassing for, man? Speak up! Has anything gone wrong?"

"Alas, Emperor, all is wrong! I fear—I fear—the whole scheme is ruined. I barely escaped with my life. Dubois—what do I know? he may have lost his already."

"Speak out, fool! What has happened? How much does the enemy know?"

"Your Highness, I know nothing. All I can tell is what occurred in my own knowledge; of what the enemy

know and what has since chanced, I am profoundly ignorant. Forgive the little I can impart."

"Ass—idiot—impart it then; tell it without delay, and make your apologies afterwards. What has happened?"

"It was perhaps in the beginning my own fault. But Dubois might have mended it if he would; I cannot acquit him from blame. But here I stand alone before you; it is on me your wrath must fall; and, Emperor, if my life will mend the harm——"

"Rascal, get on with your story; do you want to drive me mad?" shouted Napoleon, stamping with impatience.

"Never mind your worthless life; we'll settle that when I hear what you have done. Now let me have a plain tale. What has happened to you and to Dubois?"

"It was in the beginning my own fault," repeated Sauvignac. "Immediately on my landing at Hythe, I heard in a note from Dubois that the young messenger whose despatches from Nelson I brought you was close at hand on his return; and I determined to procure for you the answers he carried from Pitt. Unfortunately he woke before I had secured the packet, and I only escaped by leaving my coat in his hands—this coat containing Dubois' note which showed him his complicity in the trick."

"So he denounced the pair of you as the men who had robbed him?"

"I would have intercepted him and silenced him at all hazards; but Dubois met him first, and Dubois it seems has a weakness, a foolish tenderness for this young man. They met and fought; and Dubois on his own confession spared his life. Thereupon we had to fly for our lives. It was with difficulty we found a vessel to bring me over. I would have stayed, but Dubois would not suffer it; there was a chance for one

only, and he gave it to me. He may be unfaithful to the cause, Emperor, but he is a brave and generous man."

"No traitor to me is brave and generous; it is disloyalty to think it," exclaimed Napoleon. "I would I had that rascal here; I'd give him a lesson on fidelity he should have no chance of forgetting. But the English will settle my score for me; he is doubly traitor to them. He cannot escape; justice forbids he should escape! I need have no care on his score."

"And yet, Emperor," said Sauvignac, hesitating, "Heaven forbid I should excuse his faithlessness, but _____"

"Do not dare to speak for him—you!" exclaimed Napoleon, his anger suddenly turning on the visible object. "You, who did the whole mischief! Could you not do what you were told—did you not know you are as unfit as an infant to manage any affair by yourself, and have I not ordered you again and again to do nothing without consulting Dubois? If you had not betrayed yourself to the messenger, I should still have had him safe in my pocket. I have lost a servant who for mingled daring and subtlety, for power of intellect and skill in intrigue, had not his equal in Europe, and it is your doing and yours alone;—and the wreck of all my hopes for England goes with him!"

"Emperor!" exclaimed Sauvignac, giving the rein to his remorse. "What can I give to atone? My life is all to little, but it is all I have to offer. Take it, my Emperor; I entreat, I implore; take it, I beseech!" He drew his sword and fell on his kness before Napoleon, offering him the handle of the weapon.

"Dolt! Idiot! Do you think I'm in the mood for play-acting? How am I to land in Kent now?" cried Napoleon, stamping about the room. But it was no play-acting to Sauvignac's vehement Southern tempera-

ment; he pursued the Emperor with the tears streaming down his face, imploring either death or forgiveness. "I live and breathe but for you, my Emperor; let me atone for my fault by my death. Kill me, kill me, my Emperor! and when I am dead, forgive your servant."

"Ah, malediction! a hundred thousand devils seize you!" cried Napoleon in ungovernable irritation, kicking him over as he knelt and rushing from the room.

Sauvignac left in solitude, slowly picked himself up, sorely affronted. "He had need be a demi-god," he muttered, "for he is no gentleman. No: he is no gentleman. There are things which even the greatest loyalty cannot overlook. No: he has no comprehension of the feelings of a gentleman."

And yet, so great was the spell that Napoleon cast over those who served him, that before a fortnight has passed Sauvignac had forgiven his kicking, or at least put it out of his mind, and was again the devoted loyalist who could think no evil of his idol.

As soon as he had recovered his temper, Bonaparte went to his cabinet and again drew out his medal. "*Frappée à Londres—frappée à Londres,*" he repeated. "Ay; it shall yet be done; but now all hangs upon my fleet. Where are those ships? Are they not yet in sight on the western horizon?"

He ordered officers to stand at different points along the cliffs with telescopes, to watch and give him the earliest news of the arrival of the fleet. Consumed with impatience he galloped restlessly along the shore, or stood for hours at a time straining his eyes for the expected sails. But in vain: those white sails never rose above the horizon. Villeneuve had put back to Cadiz, and with his retreat vanished the prospect of the descent on London. That medal was destined to remain a witness of the immense audacity and frustrated ambitions of Napoleon.

The sequel is known to every one. In the following September Nelson re-embarked to seek out the French fleet with the intention not only of conquering it but of destroying it; an object which he accomplished on the 21st of October at Trafalgar with the loss of his own life. From that date England has rested free from the fear of invasion.

CHAPTER XXIII

A MARRIAGE IN HASTE

MRS. FRIEND only emerged from her swoon to fall into fever and delirium which lasted for some hours; but rest and Betty's devoted nursing restored her, and at the end of a week she was well enough to remove. The house in Harley Street was no place for her now. The hatred of the public was aroused against Friend; people gathered in the street to groan and hoot against the traitor, and to break the windows of his house. His plot was the topic of the hour; the shops were full of broadsides and caricatures in which he and Bonaparte were depicted together with every species of savage gibe and abuse. National spirit had been strained to the utmost; those were rough days, and the horror and detestation universally felt found rough expression.

As soon as she was well enough to move Mrs. Friend joined Susan at her old servant's house at Highbury, but a better retreat immediately offered itself. Her cousin Margaret Norman, whom she had not seen since her marriage, and who had since herself married a Canon of Westminster, found her out and insisted on taking her home. Letters had passed between them on the death of Mr. Norman; Mrs. Friend had written then to her cousin, who had replied affectionately, telling her of her marriage with Canon Bentley. But Mrs. Friend would not consent to the meeting she proposed. She had realized that her uncle's distrust of her husband

was too well founded, and that more than prejudice divided her from her relations.

But now Mrs. Bentley would no longer be withstood. Her affection had suffered no change; she was overwhelmed with pity and grief and horror for her cousin's position. Her husband was a kind-hearted and wide-minded man, and encouraged her to offer his house as an asylum. Mrs. Bentley drove out to Highbury, and with gentle force carried her cousin home with her.

Susan stayed. She was happy with Mrs. White and useful to her; and both the elder women felt that she ought to be spared the tragedy that had settled upon her aunt. Nor was she very anxious to go. She was awed and terrified by her aunt's suffering; and changed as her feelings were towards Friend, did not feel capable of showing sympathy. In truth she shrank from her presence.

Friend meanwhile was concentrating all his forces on preparing a line of defense. What evidence would be brought against him he did not know. He was aware that it was only on technical grounds that he could have a chance of escape. He occupied himself in studying the laws affecting him and in looking up all the precedents of his case. He was allowed to choose his counsel and to see his solicitor; he felt it was a bad sign. He had no doubt that the prosecution were determined on his death; and if there had been any weakness in their case against him he knew that difficulties would have been put in the way of his defense. But his spirits were as good as ever. As long as anything remained to be done he was never cast down. "I'll give them a good run for their money," was his thought; and the novelty of the present field, the difficulty he found in mastering the technicalities of the law, was a stimulus and delight to his active brain.

But there was a reflection of another kind that occupied him a good deal. No visitors except his attorneys, Messrs. Edwards and Willcox, a respectable firm in Lincoln's Inn, were allowed him. He heard through this channel of his wife's removal to her cousin's, and was reassured on her account; but he was anxious about Susan. In the event of his conviction the girl would be left quite unprotected. He could not bear to think of her position. She would indeed probably marry North, but he was very doubtful of Will's power to provide for her. If her grandfather would acknowledge her, or better still, accept both her and her husband, her future would be assured. But this could only be if he made up his mind to a confession of his imposition on Lord Mountstephen—a confession which naturally went against the grain. He had also to weigh the risk to himself of the prejudice the story would create; for Lord Mountstephen occupied an eminent position on the bench, and it was even possible, if any chance incapacitated the Lord Chief Justice Ellenborough, that he would preside at the trial. Still, a provision for Susan was the paramount consideration. "As for my own chances, I mustn't admit it to myself, but no one in their senses would give a rotten apple for them," he owned to himself with a whimsical smile,—“not that I am going to admit it, either. Still, it isn't worth setting against Sukey's future. If I can get her received as old Mountstephen's legitimate granddaughter and married to Will North, I shall have done as much as I can ask, and can retire at ease as far as she's concerned. And Polly? Ah, it won't do to think about Polly. Let's get through with this first.”

He explained the circumstances to his attorney, Mr. Edwards.

“The old man has shown signs of softening the last few months,” he said. “The fact is, his patience with

his precious grandson is at last wearing out. He's begun to realize that he's a bad egg, I fancy. He actually expressed a hope a while ago that Susan had grown up virtuous and well-principled! I don't know what principles he expected her to get from my family, for he has every reason to suppose it a nest of rogues. But he's softening to her. If he learns that she's his legitimate grandchild, and, above all, that she can't imperil Evelyn's succession—the property, you see, is entailed on heirs male and female—I believe he'll come round. And North will have a strong claim on his gratitude for having laid me by the heels." He chuckled.

"You can claim no gratitude on your own account, I fear," said Mr. Edwards; "not that it is not your due to some extent for having acted the part of a father to his grandchild all these years; but his anger at learning how he has been deceived will entirely blind him to every other consideration."

"Oh, of course, of course; I don't want him to feel gratitude to me. I want him to provide for Susan, and give her husband a helping hand."

"Is there no other way? We don't want to manufacture enemies at this juncture, Mr. Friend."

"As for that, he hates me like poison," said Friend; "but he's afraid of me. I have a hold over him, it's true; but how does that serve me now? If he were to be the presiding judge at my trial, and if I could reckon on his fear of my splitting about his grandson, I'd tighten my grip; but I can't count on it; he'd feel that my story would be discounted by my position. And then he isn't likely to be my judge. I shall have Lord Ellenborough, I presume."

"I presume so. But may not a prejudice get about? Will not the story leak out?"

"Perhaps; but what will it signify? A prejudice the more or less will not make the slightest difference to me.

It's so dire an offense to the good folks of England to be in league with Boney that not all the crimes in the Newgate Calendar could blacken a man further after that. If I could make a powerful friend it would be another thing; but I've no chance of that. The question is, shall I retain my hold of Lord Mountstephen, which can do me no further good now—and may perhaps do me harm; for the more he fears me the more sure he is to want to see me safely hanged and out of his way. Now if I tell, at any rate he'll know he has nothing to fear me for. And if I sacrifice my hold, I may secure his protection to my girl. I've always thought of her as mine, Mr. Edwards. She's been a daughter to me these last twelve years."

"Can't you let him know the truth without exposing yourself? Could you put Mr. North, for instance, in the way of finding the documents, so that he should think it was his own discovery?"

"Ha! a bright idea, Mr. Edwards. But 'twould make little difference. However we put it, we can't make my part look a pretty one. And somehow I seem to have a hankering that North should know I've done him this service. He has plenty of reason to think ill of me; and I should like him to feel, when all's over between us, that there's something he has to thank me for."

"Well, Mr. Friend, you will do as you think best. What part do you want me to play in the business?"

"Oh, only to get the documents and hand them to my wife. She will do all the rest. A wedding is always a woman's affair. I shan't be allowed to write, of course; but you can take a message to her. Tell her I want them to be married at once; that's necessary, for Lord Mountstephen might object to North as a son-in-law; and that the papers are my wedding gift to Susan, to be handed to her husband after the ceremony. Tell her that North is to take them to his grandfather-in-law as soon as they

are married, and present his bride to her family. We'll leave him to make the best story he can out of it; the more he blackens my character the better it'll be for himself. But it won't do to tell him so; it might rouse some queer feelings; I want him to keep up his anger for the present. I'll wager the old man receives them with open arms."

Mrs. Friend heard the intelligence of her husband's wishes with regard to Susan with unspeakable thankfulness. It relieved her from anxiety as to the girl's future, which, however, she felt far less than her husband, as she had greater confidence in Will's power to support her; and above all, she was thankful even to tears that Friend had turned in his course of double-dealing and was willing to reveal the truth. It gave her new hopes for him; at last, she thought, his heart was softened.

She sent for Will, and unfolded the story to him. It was not an easy or pleasant task, but was rendered perhaps somewhat less difficult by the fact that he was already aware of her husband's treachery, and the revelation of his falsehood came with no overwhelming shock. But that Friend should after all wish him to marry Susan and should do all in his power to facilitate the wedding, was an almost incredible surprise to him. How Friend could wish it in their present relations he could not imagine; and he listened to Mrs. Friend with a gloomy awkwardness for which the word "sulky" seems the most appropriate description.

On leaving the scene of his defeat he had gone straight to the authorities at Hythe, saw the warrant issued for the arrest of Friend and Sauvignac, and had guided the magistrates to Friend's lodging, where his papers were seized and found to include much incriminating matter. Will's penetration and promptitude received great applause, and he returned to London pluming himself

on his achievement, and swelling with righteous indignation and disdain against Friend. His first thought then was of Susan; but he could not under the changed circumstances call at her aunt's house and ask to see her; and at the same time it was necessary to meet; he could never explain satisfactorily in writing all that had occurred. But Susan was no longer in Harley Street; his letter there was forwarded to her; and though it reached her in due course for those days of slow and uncertain posts, he had not received any answer and did not know she was absent from home. It was a relief to him to hear she was away, and that her silence did not necessarily imply a change of feeling towards him. He could not but accept the proposal now made to him; it was his warmest desire to take Susan out of the hands of her dangerous protector; but he was inclined to resent the attitude of obligation in which he was placed. It was awkward also to be obliged to meet Mrs. Friend. From her he had received nothing but kindness and affection; and yet he stood before her like an enemy, conscious that he had brought ruin and misery incurable on her life. To his feelings it only intensified the unpleasantness of his position that she gave no hint of reproach, that her grief was restrained and dignified, and she showed him all her customary gentle kindness. He felt like a villain before her; and chafed at the unreasonable necessity.

So it was not quite with the unclouded joyfulness of a bridegroom that he rode down to Highbury to prosecute his wooing. He found Susan, in consequence of his letter, expecting him; she was surprised to learn that he had not yet received her reply. She was lovelier than ever to his eyes, and welcomed him with a gladness, a hardly restrained eagerness and tenderness, that he had never dared to hope. In her loneliness, and shaken by the loss of her oldest friends, her heart had turned to

him with redoubled longing; she looked to him now as her only protector, her only hope.

They had much to say about Friend, just as on that first evening before the journey down to Kent; but of how different a nature now! The reassurance, however, of the legitimacy of her birth was not news to Susan; Mrs. Friend had relieved her mind of that weight before leaving her at Highbury. That he should have invented so cruel a calumny was now perhaps Susan's greatest quarrel with her guardian. She had gradually readjusted her ideas of him and learnt to look on his treachery to his country as an integral part of his character; but that he had causelessly slandered her was an injury she saw not how to forgive. Through Will's explanation she understood the mystery now; it was no private malice towards herself, but a necessary thread of the web of intrigue in which he lived. She found her thoughts softening to him. He was anxious to secure her future happiness and had consented to her marriage with Will, and she could not but be grateful. Will, however, did not share her kinder thoughts. Still smarting under the sense of deception, he could only feel rage and indignation at the thought of his crooked paths; and that he could not shake off a feeling of obligation was an additional injury.

But he had to gain Susan's consent to an immediate marriage; and with all her joy at recovering him she shrank from the idea. After long discussion, in which she owned the force of his arguments but still replied she could not bring herself to it, she begged him to let the matter rest, to give her time to think of it. Will had to return to London that evening, and his duties at his office might prevent his coming down again till the following Saturday; so he implored her, if he were silent for the present, to give him an answer before he left. It was a short space in which to decide such a question,

but it was all that could be granted. Mrs. White, who had been Susan's nurse when she was a little girl, gave them tea, and then they went out for a walk about the Highbury and Islington fields. They did not talk except to exchange a word now and then. Will could speak of no other subject than that on which he had promised to be silent; and Susan was occupied in trying to arrive at her decision. If only the need were not quite so pressing! She felt an absolute trust in her lover, the fullest love and affection for him; she had no doubt that it was he and no other she would choose from all the world as her husband; but as yet she had seen so little of him. They had had but one meeting before this as acknowledged and permitted lovers. Even as a lover she knew little of him—and what she did know had not been of an altogether reassuring nature, if she would have allowed herself to recall it; only in the joy of reunion she would not admit any thought not entirely in his favor. It was not that she doubted him; only that she felt time necessary to ripen her feelings before she was ready to take so solemn a step. If there were no new element in marriage—if she could indissolubly unite herself to him and yet keep him on the footing of a wooer—then it might be possible. And after all, was it asking too much of him? Had he a right to expect, after so short, so broken a courtship, that the accident of their circumstances should so change her feminine nature and deprive her of her woman's privileges? Would he be in any the worse position if, while holding the certainty of possession, he was required to wait for its exercise until in the usual course he might have expected her consent? Susan thought not. It seemed to her that by making such a stipulation she could satisfy her lover and her friends and secure herself from future danger without doing violence to her own nature. Become his wife in a week's time she could not; but she

decided that if he would agree to a mere legal and formal marriage until such time as she felt herself able to consent to more, she could give him her hand at the altar in however short a space with the fullest confidence in his honor and tenderness.

Will agreed to her decision in a sort of agony of mingled impatience and ecstasy at the subtleties of female delicacy; and rode back to town to tell Mrs. Friend of her consent. Within a week the ceremony had taken place; and Will North and Susan were legally man and wife.

CHAPTER XXIV

SUSAN IS RESTORED TO HER FAMILY

LORD MOUNTSTEPHEN was at his country seat of Langley Regis, near Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire; and thither the young couple set off in a postchaise after the simple wedding breakfast. Mr. Edwards the attorney was present at the ceremony, and at its conclusion handed Will the papers relating to his wife's birth which he was to present to her grandfather. The journey was long, and to spare Susan fatigue they spent two nights on the way. On the third morning they arrived, and Susan was left at the village inn while her husband went to seek an interview with her important relative.

He was shown into the library, a long splendid room, with columns supporting the gilded ceiling, and books in tall cupboards behind glass doors. He waited for some time alone; at last a footman appeared and told him to follow. He was taken into a less magnificent but more comfortable apartment, where Lord Mountstephen sat in an armchair. He was a stately old man with a high intellectual brow and keen eyes, and a lofty distant manner.

"Mr. North? You have business with me, sir?" he said in response to Will's bow.

"I have important business, my lord, of a private nature."

"Be good enough to unfold it with all convenient brevity. Be seated, sir."

Will sat down. "I have had the infinite happiness, my lord," he began, "of becoming the husband of your granddaughter, Miss Susan Marny."

Lord Mountstephen drew his brows together. "I have no granddaughter," he said with lofty coldness.

"Pardon me, my lord. I refer to the daughter of your late son, the Honorable Mr. Chetwynd Armour, and Mlle. Marny, whom he married in France."

"There was no marriage, sir. You are misinformed. Any one, if any one there is, who claims such identity is an impostor."

"It is in order to clear up the circumstances of my wife's birth that I have called on you, my lord," said Will. "My wife was brought up, as you are aware, by Mr. Friend—the notorious Friend now awaiting his trial for treasonable correspondence with France."

"And what of that, Mr. North? What is he to me? As to the lady, I refuse to recognize her existence. You are under a complete misapprehension; and I must inform you that your application to me was a mistaken one." He was rising from his seat when Will interrupted him.

"Hear, me, my lord. It is you who are under a misapprehension. New facts have just come to light which I have to communicate to your lordship."

"I cannot hear you, sir," said Lord Mountstephen hastily. "There can be no facts in which I have an interest. I must ask you to leave me."

"Not until you have seen the documents I bring, my lord," said Will firmly.

Lord Mountstephen started. "Documents?" he asked. "What documents?"

"Certified copies of the acts of the marriage and birth," replied Will.

"Of the originals which were destroyed in the Revolution?"

"Just so, my lord. Here they are."

Lord Mountstephen stretched out a trembling hand and Will handed him the packet. He opened it, and then paused, casting a suspicious glance at the young man.

"Read them, my lord!" urged Will. Again he shot a piercing look at North, and then turned his eyes on the papers, his hand shaking so that he could with difficulty read them. Will watched his glance traveling backwards and forwards, till suddenly he started and cried out in a strained voice, "What's this? What's this date? 1788?"

"That was the date of the marriage with Mlle. Marny," replied Will quietly.

"Good God! . . . And the witness's evidence? The sworn declaration of the witness to the marriage in 1781?"

"An imposture, I presume," said Will. "He has confessed as much. The marriage, as you see, did not take place till 1788."

Lord Mountstephen leant back in his chair, deadly pale. "All these years,—" he muttered, "—all these years! As surely as there's a God in Heaven, he shall hang!"

"And never did man deserve it better," agreed Will below his breath.

There was a long pause. At length Will broke it. "If your lordship will give me permission, I should like to have the honor of presenting my wife to you," he said.

Lord Mountstephen turned and regarded him loftily.

"And who are you, sir? Give some account of yourself—of your acquaintanceship with this villain."

"I became acquainted with him three months ago," replied Will. "I certainly am the last man to wish to offer any excuse for him; he deceived me in the most

cold-blooded and cruel manner. All I can say is that he made me his complete dupe. But he introduced me to his family—to Miss Marny—and I was received by them with the greatest kindness. I must beg you, my lord, to dissociate them from any idea of participation in or knowledge of that man's crimes. I became attached to Miss Marny; and he, for reasons of his own which I do not profess to understand, approved of my attachment. I was permitted to think I had won her affections; and, I do not know why, after our rupture, after his exposure, he still desired our marriage and furnished me with the means of accomplishing it. It may have been a wish to secure his ward's happiness—though I can scarcely credit him with so respectable a motive. At any rate, he proposed to confide to me on my marriage the documents in his possession proving the legitimacy of her birth; and for her sake as well as my own, eager as I was to rescue her from his hands, you may suppose I did not hesitate to accept his proposals."

Lord Mountstephen listened in silence. "What is your family?" he asked at length. "Who were your parents? What is your occupation?"

"I am of no family," said Will shortly. "I can claim no father. I am illegitimate. Before you blame me for marrying your granddaughter, remember that it was my highest hope to do so when I knew nothing of her family; when she appeared to be as friendless and as nameless as myself. And you should remember, too, that you yourself did all that was in your power to cast upon her the same stigma that rests upon me."

Lord Mountstephen was silent for an instant. "Well, it is done now and cannot be undone. What is your occupation, young man? Or have you private means on which to support your wife?"

"I have no private means. I have supported myself since my eighteenth year, and do not doubt that I shall

be able to support my wife likewise. Lately I have been employed in the Admiralty Office."

"How did you obtain your appointment?"

"It was procured for me by Mr. Thomas Raby, member for Ashford, at the instance, I believe, of Mr. Friend. Mr. Friend showed me at that time, I must admit, what I took to be the greatest kindness. I had no suspicion of his true character till a chance put into my hands unmistakable evidence of his treason."

"Unmistakable evidence! Were you then concerned in his exposure and arrest?"

"I may say I caused both," said Will. "It was at my instance that the warrant for his arrest was issued, and I believe mine will be the principal evidence against him at his trial."

Lord Mountstephen's stern expression relaxed. "You may congratulate yourself then on one good deed at least, young man," he said. "Ay, and live as long as you may and fill your life as full of deserving actions as you can, you are never likely to do a better than causing the arrest and death of that villain."

Will was modestly silent; yet there was a faint consciousness somewhere in his mind that the praise was not entirely pleasant to him.

He resumed on the subject he was most interested in. "I should be obliged if you would give me an answer to my request, my lord. May I have the honor of presenting my wife to you?"

"A moment, young man. Do not go too fast. If you have married my granddaughter, I cannot undo it; but I can still refuse to acknowledge her. But she seems to be the legitimate daughter of my ill-fated son; and since her claims cannot interfere with the rights of my heir, I should wish to see her, and if I am satisfied with her, to own the relationship. But if there's a pair of you, I must be satisfied that you are worthy of my

family as well as she. From what you tell me, you have done the State an excellent service in the exposure of this scoundrel; and I am willing to acknowledge I have reason myself to feel in your debt for so frankly placing in my hands those papers. But you will consider, no doubt, it is discharged if I receive you as my granddaughter's husband."

"I make no claim on your lordship," said Will. "I claim your recognition for my wife as her right; that is my whole object."

"But if I acknowledge her I must acknowledge you as well, if you are in reality her husband."

"I am in reality her husband."

"When and where did the ceremony take place?"

"At St. Michael's, a chapel of ease at Islington, near London, on the 19th instant. We were married by the Rev. Mr. Hudson, a minor canon of Westminster Cathedral. Mr. Edwards, an attorney of reputation, was a witness. Here is the certificate."

Lord Mountstephen put it in his pocket.

"Well, Mr. North, I hope you will not discredit your choice," he said. "You seem to be a well-intentioned young man; and under the unfortunate circumstances I cannot fairly raise objections to you as a husband for my granddaughter on the score of your birth. If you give me reason to be satisfied with your conduct, I shall be willing to use my interest for your advance; but remember, it depends entirely on your behavior and on your wife's. You may introduce her to me at one o'clock to-morrow."

The momentous interview passed off with the greatest success. From the first moment the impression that Susan made on her grandfather was entirely favorable. He saw in her the exact image of her father; she was far more like him than was her step-brother Evelyn; and

softened thoughts and memories rushed over the old man in a flood at the sight of her, and woke long-forgotten regrets and tenderness. Her beauty and her gentle modest self-possession served her; he perceived that she was not only in every way worthy of his name and family, but that she would bring a new softness and joy into his life; she would give him a fresh object for hopes and ambition and affection. Before they left the house he was pressing them to take up their residence beneath his roof, an invitation which they could not decline.

And now began a new existence, both for Susan and her husband. Every day increased Lord Mountstephen's fondness for his granddaughter. He made her large presents of money, loaded her with jewels, introduced her and Will to all the magnates of the county, and celebrated their arrival with visits, dinners, and balls. The young couple found themselves a center of interest to the neighborhood. Susan's beauty and her romantic restoration to her family, and Will's good looks and the renown he had acquired through the arrest of Friend, gave them luster on their own account besides the importance of their relationship to the eminent Lord Mountstephen. It must be admitted that Will's head was a little turned by flattery and success. For the first time in his life he found himself popular and courted and overflowing with money. People came and congratulated him on his detection of the traitor Friend, and praised him for his success in procuring his arrest; and Will, after in vain assuring them that he had exercised no remarkable penetration, could have done nothing else, and had had nothing to do with the actual capture, began to give up the attempt to disclaim their admiration, and ended by accepting it and taking himself for a mighty fine fellow. The atmosphere of popularity, too, was entirely novel to him and somewhat relaxing. No longer without a family or name, secure of himself and

of his position, he moved about freely and lost his diffidence, gave the rein to the natural sociability and friendliness of his disposition, and became the hail-fellow-well-met of all the young gentry and nobility of the neighborhood. To some it is true he was aware at the bottom of his heart there was a repugnance; but it was amazing how pleasant all made themselves to him, even those whom he knew in his old life he would have hated and despised. He got into difficulties once or twice through his too great openness of speech. At first, abandoning himself to the pleasant sense of security and good-fellowship, he certainly talked too freely; but he quickly perceived the results of his indiscretion, especially when he confessed the closeness of his connection with Friend, and began to recognize it was sometimes necessary to be on one's guard among friends as well as among foes. But notwithstanding these trifling rubs he was exceedingly happy. He was married to Susan, he had achieved what he felt to be a secure and brilliant position, his days were filled with pleasures, and he looked forward to a future of still higher successes and of unclouded felicity.

But Susan was by no means equally content; and the perception that she was not was the only cloud on Will's happiness; and as he found himself unable to cheer her he was inclined to blame her for her want of enjoyment. She missed her home and her aunt; she bitterly missed the simplicity of her old life. Her social triumphs were all very well, and she would have enjoyed them thoroughly if she could have shared them and talked them over with Will; but a cloud had come between her and her husband which destroyed all her power of finding pleasure in other things. She was home-sick; she was lonely; and she found Will out of touch with her. Carried away by elation and excitement, he did not perceive the moral crisis through which she was passing;

and her failure to accept their good fortune as easily as he did himself insensibly vexed him. After all, he was only a boy of twenty-one; it was very natural that for a fortnight—it was no longer—he should give himself up to enjoyment without reflection; but it was a critical fortnight for their married happiness. He was not unkind to her; on the contrary, he exerted himself to assure her of his love and adoration; but she could not respond. She was out of tune. The manners of the men and even of some of the women she now met revolted her. In contrast with them Friend's memory shone; at least his private life was clean. Lord Mountstephen's acquaintances might be models of patriotism and public virtue, but in other respects she judged them, as revealed partly by gossip and a little by actual glimpses, not worthy to be compared with him. In truth Mrs. Friend's household had been a poor preparation for fashionable life. She began to realize now how much she had learnt to depend on her aunt's strict standard and exalted atmosphere. She had recognized the constraint they inflicted, but not the strength she had received from them. Now that she had lost them she felt all her moral supports were withdrawn, and that at the crisis when she most needed them. If she turned to her husband for help, she found him occupied with race-meetings, dinners and festivities, full of animosity and unseeing scorn towards Friend, and all his higher qualities lost in self-satisfaction and vain-glory.

A grievous shock was given her one night after Lord Mountstephen's great dinner in their honor. A profusion of wines and deep drinking were still counted a necessary part of hospitality on a great scale; every one wished to take wine with Lord Mountstephen's new relative, and it was impossible to refuse without rudeness. Will therefore could not manage to avoid drinking a good deal more than was good for him; and indeed

the task would have taxed an experienced and tactful man of the world. Considering the prevalence of drunkenness at the time and under the circumstances, he might perhaps have been pardoned; but Susan had no mercy or tolerance when she discovered what was the matter with him; she was filled with disgust and anger, and the ideal she still strove to cherish fell in fragments at her feet. Anything else she felt she might have forgiven—she had already had something to forgive—but the thought of his foolish, meaningless laughter and flushed idiotic face was too revolting. He had by his own act given her a new image of himself in place of her old worshipped one, an image perhaps even more unjust in its travesty of his true self than the former had been in the opposite direction; and she had no more power to rid herself of the new than of the old. Her adoration was succeeded by bitter contempt. When he came to his senses with an aching head and a general sense of degradation, he was indeed very penitent, and asked her pardon most contritely; but her disillusionment was too recent for immediate forgiveness; and unfortunately Will in his discomfort went for counsel to one of his new friends, a young man of open, friendly temper but of no depth or refinement of feeling, who laughed at his remorse and gave him a little sensible man-of-the-worldly discourse on the subordination of wives and the attitude to be exacted from them towards manly freedoms and peccadillos. Will's looseness of tongue, when it betrayed him into discussing the most delicate relations of marriage with a man of this stamp, did him harm which he had bitterly to repent.

Then she had to undergo the unpleasant experience of an introduction to her step-brother. He happily had lost all his effrontery, and was as anxious to avoid her as she could be to avoid him; so the occasion passed off better than she feared. He had done his best to in-

fluence his grandfather against the newcomers, expressing unmeasured disgust on hearing that young North, a low prize-ring bully, mere scum of the town as he described him, should be claiming the position of his brother-in-law. But Lord Mountstephen having once decided to accept Will, refused to change his course. "It is too late to disown him now," he said; "he is your sister's husband, and as such we must accept him. He is a gentleman; and the less we say about his past the better." On which Mr. Armour withdrew to town. He was not going, he declared, to allow himself to appear on equal terms with such a fellow.

But a more trying element of Susan's position was her relation to Friend. His approaching trial was the theme of conversation everywhere; his name was the signal for universal execration; and the more she heard him vilified, the more her heart softened towards him. Now that he was found out and about to pay the penalty of his misdeeds, Susan began to lose the horror with which they had inspired her. She remembered his unfailing consideration, his tenderness to her; the insight and sympathy on which she had relied, and never in vain; and gradually she forgave his crimes. But to the world around her he was a monster, something scarcely human in baseness. Men were even less careful in those days than they are now of how they pronounced on a case still awaiting trial, and Friend was tried and condemned in every print and every tavern and in every man's daily talk. Not a doubt was felt of his guilt or of the fate that awaited him. The whole nation was hot for his death. It seemed to Susan that the people around her were like bloodhounds on a trail, or a pack of wolves clamoring for their prey. And Will appeared actually to like to talk about him. One evening after she had been listening to an eager exposition of the danger the country had run and the necessity of stamping

out treason with the sternest measures, she could not refrain from reproaching her husband for his share in the conversation. "You at least ought surely to be silent," she said; "are you not to be a chief witness at his trial?"

"Yes, certainly; but why should I be silent on account of that? Doesn't that place me in the best position for knowing his guilt?"

"Keep your view of his guilt then till it is called for in the court of justice," said Susan; "surely it is not justice nor law either to pronounce on him before he is tried. And you, too, you of all men, ought not to speak against him unnecessarily."

"Why so, Susan? Didn't he deceive me shamefully? Hasn't he wronged me as much as a man can do?"

"I don't deny he deceived you. But has he been no friend to you? What would you be now if it had not been for him? Still a prizefighter in Lord Combleigh's train, I suppose. And if you say he advanced you for his own purposes, it was hardly for his own advantage that he was so kind to you, so genial, so warm a friend. And shall I remind you that you would hardly be living here and married to me if it had not been for him?"

"How can we tell what his motive was? He is a bad man, Susan; and I can't believe that he has done anything for us for our sakes and without a view to his own interest."

"You don't know him—you don't understand him, Will. He is a bad man; I can't deny it, in some respects; but not in all. Contrast him with some of the people you see here; think of him at home; think of him with my aunt; did you ever know a more devoted husband, a better master, a more indulgent guardian? Oh, when I look at the men about me and think of him, I am ready to call him a saint! Let him be a traitor to his king and

his country, loyalty is not the only virtue. His wife at least has no cause to reproach him."

Will understood that she implied she could not say as much for him; and his conscience smote him. "Susan," he said, "You know—you know I am very sorry."

"Oh, of what use is your sorrow?" cried Susan impatiently. She turned coldly away from him. He discouraged by many previous repulses, left the room. She threw herself on a couch and burst into a passion of tears. She felt herself the forlornest, most desolate creature on the face of the earth.

CHAPTER XXV

THE TRIAL—FIRST DAY

THIS clouded honeymoon, however, if painful, was soon over. By the end of the month their return to London was fixed; Lord Ellenborough's gout still confined him to his room, and it was known that Lord Mountstephen would preside at the trial. He had not a scruple in undertaking the task. Nicety of conscience in such matters appears to be a modern growth. Lord Mountstephen's view was that the more he knew of Friend's villainy the more justified he was in hanging him. He meant to give him a fair trial; but he had no idea that fairness involved a real presumption of his innocence.

Susan was very anxious to witness the trial. No account would satisfy her; it was too terribly engrossing to her. Her grandfather at last consented that she should be present; and on the 3rd of September they went up to town. A Special Commission had been issued, as the case was considered of the gravest importance; and proceedings began on the 4th. The trial, however, was not reached till September 11th, the usual preliminaries taking up the interval.

Susan looked about her at the close-packed court, the judges in their scarlet and ermine on the bench, and the tightly-tied bunches of sweet-smelling herbs lying in front of them. She was herself provided with a nosegay of rosemary and southernwood to smell at when the air of the court became oppressive. At present, at

nine o'clock in the morning, no foul odors were perceptible, though the atmosphere was close and stagnant. She looked about for faces she knew. She saw Dr. Bentley in a prominent place; and by-and-by she made out Betty's familiar features in the gallery. Mrs. Friend, of course, would not be there.

The court hummed and buzzed like a beehive. Presently the sounds deepened; an angry murmur mixed with hisses rose on the ear. The prisoner was being brought in. The sounds swelled to a roar of fury; ushers cried for silence; the judges looked round sternly. With great reluctance the audience stilled its clamor. Friend was placed at the bar. Susan's heart leaped. He looked absolutely the same; his very self, untouched with any appearance of guilt or fear or suffering. How familiar, how reassuring, his countenance was to her! A pang of home-sickness went through her at the sight. She could hardly keep herself from weeping, not so much on account of his situation as for the loss of all he represented to her, her home and her peaceful girlhood spent in happy dreams. She had awakened since to realities that were stern indeed. She wondered if he saw her. He looked round the court, and she thought his glance included her, but it passed on again as if she were a stranger.

Then began the tedious business of calling over the jury. Friend had warned his counsel to be on the alert in challenging the jurors. He did not believe it would signify anything in the end what particular dozen of "good men and true" considered his case; but it was his policy to throw every possible difficulty in the prosecution's way, and to lengthen out the proceedings by every possible device. So name after name, to the number of seventy-five, was brought forward and challenged on technical or other grounds. The most ingenious and far-fetched objections were raised, generally to be over-

ruled by the Court, but not until a lengthy wrangle had taken place. After nearly three hours of this, the judge lost patience, swept aside the counsel's plea, "My lord, I am fighting for my client's life," and the twelve were duly sworn in.

Then followed the indictment, beginning with the usual stately flourishes. "The jurors for our lord the king upon their oath present that John Friend, late of Harley Street in the county of Middlesex, being a subject of our said lord the now king, not having the fear of God in his heart nor weighing the duty of his allegiance, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil as a false traitor against our said lord the now king, his supreme, true, lawful and undoubted lord;—the cordial love and true and due obedience which every true and dutiful subject of our sovereign lord the king towards him our said lord the king should bear, wholly withdrawing; and contriving and intending the peace and common tranquillity of this kingdom to disquiet, molest, and disturb——" It went on for a long time, and Susan could not follow it through its technicalities. The prisoner pleaded "Not Guilty." Then the Attorney-General rose to open the prosecution. The papers in cipher that Will had seized had been interpreted, and together with the French correspondence disclosed a sufficiently damning story. But more than the recent plot had come to light through the late researches. The whole story of his political intrigues was laid bare.

"My lords and gentlemen of the jury," said Mr. Attorney-General (the unfortunate Spencer Perceval, who seven years later met his death in the lobby of the House of Commons by the shot of a madman with a grievance), "the accused appears to be one of those monsters of depravity whose crimes arouse a feeling of incredulity in the sane and honest breast of an ordinary Englishman; so difficult is it to our nation to credit the existence of

systematic treachery and studied and mercenary turpitude. The crime of which the prisoner is accused might well appear to you past credence if it were a recent or a solitary growth; but I shall show you that this man has spent the best years of his life in plots and treason, that he has with callousness of conscience past belief trafficked in the betrayal of confidence, and that no crime against his country has been too appalling, no treachery too base for him, if only he could obtain the vile rewards of cupidity.

“Holding a confidential though subordinate post as a clerk in the Foreign Office, he had opportunities of acquiring a thorough knowledge of our relations with foreign countries; and it seems to have occurred to him early in his career that more money was to be made (such was the base motive which appears to have guided him throughout) by the betrayal of his country's secrets to her enemies, than by honorably and faithfully serving her in his humble position. Being a man of exceptional ability he was much employed in delicate and secret negotiations, which it now appears he never failed to turn to his own vile purposes. In 1796 he was sent to Ireland to report on the unhappy disturbances there, and it is evident through the recent discoveries that he was in communication with the French General Hoche, who at that very time effected a landing on the coast, and was divulging the plans of the Government to him while he pretended to be supplying his legitimate employers with information about the invaders. Two years later he appears to have been in the practice of selling information from our Government to the rebel Wolfe Tone and the French Government, whilst nominally serving his country by reporting trivialities about the rebels' movements. In short, it is not too much to say that in every disturbance which has troubled the peace and prosperity of our country for the last ten years, the

prisoner at the bar has been intimately concerned. More definite still is the information we have of his doings in 1803, when he was employed as an agent by those mistaken enthusiasts who sought to relieve their country of her dreaded enemy by the dagger of the assassin. Let me not be thought to impute to our Government a knowledge of the indefensible schemes of the exiled Royalists; yet regretfully I must admit that there were Englishmen ready to join in the counsels of those who shrank not from murder; and the plot of Georges Cadoudal against Bonaparte was supported not only by English gold but by the advice and influence of mistaken Englishmen. Of these the prisoner was the agent. But while blaming the unbalanced judgment of those who could soil the sacred cause of their country by participation in crime, what shall we say of the conduct of the prisoner, who agreed to their proposals, encouraged their bloodthirsty schemes, accepted their wages, and then betrayed them to the common enemy of them and of his country? Georges Cadoudal, wild but loyal enthusiast, sealed with his blood his devotion to the lost cause of his king; on this man lies the guilt of his death;¹ on this man, who cannot even plead loyalty to the Corsican usurper as his excuse; who stands as black a traitor to his country and his nation as to the employers who trusted and rewarded him."

Mr. Perceval then came to the present plot, giving a

¹ Friend's historian may perhaps be permitted a word here to rebut this accusation, which was the only thing in the prosecutor's speech which really annoyed him. Even had he had the opportunity, however, he would have disdained to defend himself to so hostile an audience. But he had in reality entertained a great admiration for Cadoudal; and though foreseeing from the first the result of his plot, he sincerely regretted his death. It was true he had revealed the confidences of his English accomplices to Napoleon, but he had had no hand whatever in Cadoudal's betrayal, who would inevitably have lost his life had the English complicity in his plot never come to Napoleon's knowledge.

graphic description of the danger in which the country stood, of Sauvignac's visits and of Friend's connection with him, and their plan to assist Napoleon's disembarkation. The correspondence which lay before the Court revealed it with sufficient precision; and all felt that, with that damning evidence against him, not a chance, not a hope, was left for the prisoner. He knew it himself. "I'm not going to bate one feather's weight of my struggle," he was saying to himself; "I'm going to fight on just as if I had a chance of getting off; still, I may call myself a dead man now." He remained unmoved if grim; resolved to let no trace of sensibility be visible in his bearing. He stiffened his muscles and stood firm and composed. The feeling of the audience was so intense that the Attorney-General's eloquence of invective was hardly needed. When he concluded and sat down a sound ran through the court, a hard indrawing of breath, and every eye was fixed on the prisoner with malignity that seemed to create a visible atmosphere around him, as if he had been cut off from the humanity about him by an impassable barrier.

Susan's heart beat high, for now the witnesses for the prosecution were to be called; and so did that of her husband as he stepped into the witness-box. When the trial was actually within sight he had begun to shrink from his duty as witness. His animosity was gradually dying away; Susan's expostulations had forcibly recalled to him his happy early relations with Friend. He felt that the denunciation did not come gracefully from him. And the sight of Friend and his composed, manly bearing recalled his past attachment yet more vividly. A reaction in his favor too was caused by the visible hostility of the audience; the atmosphere of the trial was not that of a court of impartial justice; the case was too obviously that of one man fighting for his life against an organized army hungry for his death. Will was conscious of pain-

ful agitation as he took the oath, and then looking at the prisoner received his full, keen glance, which pierced him through as though it could read his inmost thoughts. He hastily averted his eyes; he did not dare to face a look like that.

The examining counsel elicited from him the story of his mission to Pitt with the letters, their robbery and subsequent recovery, and his detection of Sauvignac with the incriminating note from Friend. This note was produced and he identified it; other specimens of the prisoner's handwriting were shown and identified, and were in turn passed to the jury. His courage rose a little as he retraced all that had happened; after all, no other course had been possible for him; and the duty of telling the truth openly and without fear was a plain one.

But when he had finished, Serjeant Mortimer, Friend's counsel, rose, and with a very sweet smile intimated that he wished to cross-examine the witness.

"Will you have the goodness, Mr. North," he began, "to tell the jury when and how you first met the prisoner?"

"It was at Brighton this last May. I had been fortunate enough to be of some service to Mr. Friend's ward, in the course of which I—I met with a slight—an accident; an accident which temporarily disabled me. Mrs. Friend in the absence of her husband was kind enough to take me into her house and nurse me until I had recovered; and on Mr. Friend's return I was introduced to him."

"Oh yes; oh yes; and an acquaintance—I think I may say a friendship—resulted?"

"Yes; I received the greatest kindness both from Mrs. and Mr. Friend. At that time I was quite unaware of his treasonable activities."

"Oh! you were quite unaware of his treasonable activities?" drawled Sergeant Mortimer, laying an am-

biguous emphasis on the two last words. "May I ask whether you perceived anything in his behavior or conversation which aroused your suspicions?"

"No, nothing whatever."

"Are you confident of that? Did not some trifling circumstance strike you? You surely felt some doubts or qualms?"

"Never; certainly never. Mr. Friend's whole bearing and conduct impressed me with the most entire belief in his rectitude. I never met a man I trusted so entirely. I could not have believed——"

"Never mind what you could not have believed, Mr. North; I want the jury to hear what you did believe. You did believe Mr. Friend to be a loyal subject and an honorable man, then, I understand? You were very favorably impressed by him?"

"Exceedingly so. I cannot speak highly enough of his kindness, and that of his wife, to me."

"Ah; I see. Well, Mr. North, and what was the next step in your acquaintance?"

"I think I must call the next step my receiving an appointment to a clerkship in the Admiralty Office, which I believe was due to his influence."

"Indeed! He possessed influence to procure you a clerkship in so important an office! Surely you had other claims to so good an appointment?"

"None whatever. I was entirely friendless, and I may even say destitute, at the time."

"It appears to me as if you owed my client a heavy debt of gratitude, Mr. North. And now I must ask you a further question. Has it come to your ears lately that Mr. Friend has an enemy in high quarters, an influential personage of an eminence to which I will not more particularly allude, who imagines he entertains a grievance against him of old standing, in consequence of which he has been known to threaten his death?"

Will was silent, excessively uncomfortable. Lord Mountstephen was regarding the daring counsel with a rigid and colorless countenance, his eyes gleaming dangerously, but not a muscle of his face moved. Serjeant Mortimer kept his eyes heedfully away from his direction, concentrating them relentlessly on Will. Friend watched with close attention, a twinkle of sardonic enjoyment lurking in his expression.

"Well, Mr. North?"

"I—I believe—I suppose—I imagine I understand to what you refer," faltered Will, almost inaudibly.

"I do not refer, sir; I ask a plain question, to which I want a plain answer. Do you know if there is such a person?"

"I—I believe there is," stammered the witness.

"Do you *know* there is, Mr. North? Have you with your own ears heard him threaten my client with death?"

"I—I believe I have."

"Speak up, Mr. North; let the jury hear you. Have you or have you not heard this individual threaten the prisoner with death?"

"I have."

"And is it not a fact, Mr. North," said the Serjeant, drawing himself up and swelling out to his fullest proportions, and bending the utmost terrors of his frown on Will, "that you have lately—since laying information against the prisoner—you have lately been receiving many favors from this individual, have enjoyed his hospitality, and have even received sums of money from him?"

"I have," stammered the wretched witness.

"And how much money have you received?"

"I cannot say—it was not all in one sum—it was at different times—they were entirely friendly gifts."

"It was as a friendly gift that you received this

blood-money! And to how much might it amount? I must press you for an answer, Mr. North. You cannot possibly be ignorant. Was it as much as a thousand pounds? Five hundred? Two thousand?"

"Perhaps altogether about six hundred pounds," faltered Will; "but it was not on that account—it was for an altogether different reason."

"Mr. North, you are speaking on your oath. Do you mean to deny that the reason of the extraordinary favor which this individual showed you was that you had brought about the arrest of the man he had vowed to ruin?"

"That—that was not the only reason."

"Not the only reason? But perhaps the principal one? Would you mind explaining to the jury what the other reason was?"

But Will remained silent. He could not bring himself to refer to Susan, even if it had not been a matter of common knowledge that he had recently married the presiding judge's granddaughter. Lord Mountstephen hardly breathed. Serjeant Mortimer did not press for the answer he had no wish to obtain. "The witness cannot explain what the other reason for this extraordinary generosity was, gentlemen," he said sneeringly to the jury; "I think we may rest content with what we have learnt. We are beginning to see something that looks to me very like a conspiracy against my client." "My lord—gentlemen——" interrupted Will, in an agony; but the Serjeant turned on him fiercely. "Silence, sir; do not interfere with the course of justice. I have no doubt you would like to protest against seeing your actions brought into the light of day; but it is not permitted you, sir; this is a court of law and justice. Your part is to answer my questions; it is for the jury to deduce from your replies the true nature of your deeds." He glared at him in silence. Will, cowed

and confused, was not quite sure for the moment whether the charge was not true.

“And now, Mr. North,” resumed the torturer, “I want a little more light on this extraordinary tale of the robbery of the Government despatches. On whom did your suspicions first alight when you discovered your loss?”

Will narrated his suspicions of Rangsley, and led on by the counsel told the tale of how he had arrested him, and had been in his turn captured, and finally released by Friend.

“And do you not suppose, Mr. North,” said his questioner, “that had my client really been in league with this French spy, it would have been far simpler and safer for him to have left you in the hands of the smugglers and to have retained the packet?”

“Perhaps it might.”

“At any rate, it seems very evident to me that he would not have been standing where he stands to-day had he taken such a course. But he risked his life by venturing among those bloodthirsty savages to save yours—your life, whom, had he been the traitor you pretend, he must have known to be his enemy. Was this the conduct of a conscienceless and cold-blooded traitor? Eh, Mr. North? Or was it not rather that of a faithful and disinterested friend? What do you say, Mr. North?” But Will could not answer. “You prefer to make no reply to this question, I perceive. Perhaps we can hardly expect it. I think the jury will be the better able to appreciate your silence when they have heard your answers to the questions I am next going to put. Now, Mr. North, let me remind you, you are upon your oath. I require a truthful answer; and here your silence will no longer be permitted. Will you inform the jury what was your occupation previous to your acquaintance with Mr. Friend?”

"I—I was in the service of Lord Combleigh," said Will, the sweat breaking out on his brow.

Friend's twinkle of amusement had disappeared, and his countenance darkened as Will's torture proceeded. At this point he scribbled some words on a scrap of paper and passed them to his attorney.

"In the service of Lord Combleigh?" continued Serjeant Mortimer; "of Lord Combleigh, the eminent Corinthian, that pattern to our younger nobility? An honorable service, indeed! And pray, in what capacity, Mr. North?"

Will hesitated.

"Come, out with it, Mr. North. In what capacity did you serve Lord Combleigh?"

The attorney here put Friend's note into the counsel's hand; and while waiting for Will's answer he glanced over it. A brief interchange of looks took place between him and his client. He frowned, protesting. Friend insisted. He turned back to the jury with an impatient gesture. "My lords and gentlemen of the jury, the prisoner with unexampled generosity is unwilling that I should further expose this unfortunate young man. The tenderness which he still bears to his young friend of former days will not suffer me to drag into the light of day all his shameful past"—Friend cast a threatening glance at his counsel.—"In deference to his generous susceptibilities I will say no more on this topic; the witness is excused. But, gentlemen, I rely on your love of fair play to bear in mind that it is only the forbearance of the prisoner that——" Here one of the judges, after a look and word interchanged with Lord Mountstephen, interposed. "The learned counsel must confine himself at present to his cross-examination; he cannot be permitted at this point to speak in the defense." Serjeant Mortimer bowed. "If your lordship pleases. I had just concluded. I only wish to

point out to the jury that there are facts against the witness which he is unable to deny, and which but for the generosity of my client they would hear him admit with his own mouth; and I therefore appeal to them not to let the noble disinterestedness of the prisoner prejudice his cause, but with the candor and generosity of Englishmen to give him the benefit of his self-sacrifice." Speaking very rapidly, Serjeant Mortimer finished his exordium before he could be checked again, and sat down with a look of conscious triumph.

Will, shaken and bruised in spirit, stumbled out of the witness-box. As he did so he shot a glance at Friend, and received a smile so hearty, reassuring, and comprehending, that at the same time it strengthened him like a cordial and went to his heart like an arrow. He retired to the back of the court and tried to hide himself. His misery was intense. The Serjeant's representations, unfair though he knew them to be, roused the acutest sense of the ill return he had made to Friend. His old affection returned on him in a flood. The prisoner's dignified calm, his carelessness of self, the absence of all petty feeling or weakness, revived his admiration. He forgot that he had been duped and betrayed by him; he only saw the man who had befriended him and had stood between him and his worser self. Once again Friend shot up to the stature of a hero.

Sorrow and admiration were strengthening their grip on Susan also, and were increased by the contrast which she drew between him and her husband as he appeared in the witness-box. She made no allowance for his agony; in fact, the very signs of his suffering, his shaking knees, the trembling hand that wiped his streaming brow, his changing color, revolted her. She did not perceive that he was going through an ordeal far more severe than the prisoner's; and she burnt with deep

resentment against him for the public exposure he made of himself and her. "A drunkard; a weakling," she pronounced him: and then she turned away her thoughts with indignant contempt and concentrated them on the prisoner in the dock, who confronted his enemies and his doom with disdainful ease. She longed to catch his eye and silently implore some sign of recognition.

There were a few other witnesses, who spoke to the seizure of the papers and the scene of the arrest; and then the case for the Crown was closed. It was nearly seven o'clock, and the Court adjourned till the next day. Susan, very silent and absorbed, drove home to his house in Russell Square with her grandfather, who was as disinclined as herself for conversation. Perhaps of all who suffered during the course of the trial, his torture during Serjeant Mortimer's audacious references to him had been the keenest. With every word he waited to hear himself betrayed: and even though the scene had ended without direct identification, he felt that all who knew him and his relations to the witness would instantly perceive the truth. Bitterly he wished he had declined to preside. But his pride had forbidden him to allow that he had as much as heard of Friend before his name gained notoriety through his arrest. He sat still in stoical composure, never flinching when the prisoner turned his eyes on him and pierced him with a look of triumphant mockery. "Yes, old man," his glance said plainly, "you may prove me guilty of high treason, but how do you come out from this ordeal? How do you like the part that you have played?" His solace was to remember that his turn was coming; that it would soon be his part to draw Friend for the public view in any colors he liked; and deeply he vowed that he would be equal to the occasion.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TRIAL—SECOND DAY

WHEN the Court sat the next morning Serjeant Mortimer rose for the defense. Susan had looked forward to his speech with breathless impatience, hoping against reason that the facts against the prisoner should be swept away. But she was disappointed. The Serjeant did indeed suggest that the papers had not been proved to belong to Friend, and that there was no evidence to show the prisoner's identity with the Dubois addressed in the correspondence; but these arguments were felt to be so weak that he did not linger on them. Then he came to Will's evidence, which he treated with disdain as unworthy of belief. "In fact, my lords and gentlemen, the truth about this miserable young man is easy to recognize. Born and brought up in infamous surroundings, he was rescued and placed in respectable circumstances by my client; but, with a mind insensible to gratitude or any feeling of obligation, forgetful of the affection and respect that even now he cannot deny having entertained, he allowed himself to be bribed to enter the infamous conspiracy against him, betrayed him to his enemies, and is immediately afterwards found wallowing in the favor and golden rewards of one whom he admits to have plotted with him his death. To this you have heard him himself confess. Can it be doubted that this note on which the witness relied for the establishment of the prisoner's guilt was a forgery, was part

of the plot concocted for his destruction? For is it possible to believe that had my client really been at that moment implicated in the schemes of the French spy, he would have imperiled his life among the smugglers for the rescue of North, as you have heard from the last-named's own lips that he did? You have heard from him too his impressions of the character of my client—the character given him by an avowed enemy. Is this consonant with his tale of treason? No, gentlemen; my client is the victim of a plot; of an intrigue blacker than any attributed to him, and which only the fear of powerful enemies and the deference due to those high in the confidence and counsels of the nation prevents me from unveiling. Would that I might—would that I dared! The very hair would bristle on your heads, gentlemen—a thrill of horror would run through this court at the turpitude revealed in the highest places. My client, gentlemen, is not a wealthy man; he is not a great man, of birth and breeding and consideration in the eyes of the world. His way he has made himself by sheer industry and talent; friendless, without wealth, without influence, he stands alone. But all these advantages were arrayed against him. His enemy is one of the great ones of the earth, wealthy, influential, honored. All the privileges of position and fortune were possessed by the man who vowed to ruin him; who laid his plans and spread his toils with devilish ingenuity; and who, when he saw the tool for which he had waited, without remorse and without difficulty—oh, be sure, without much difficulty!—bought up the wretched young man on whose evidence the prosecution relies, and concocted with him the story of his treason and the flimsy testimony of the note on which it is supported.

“But, gentlemen, I am here alone and unaided; I sustain an unpopular cause. The great ones of the

earth are against me; what chance has the poor man, friendless and obscure, against the banded influence of the governing, the landed, and the moneyed classes? We know what has happened to the champions of the people's liberty; we know how the prison and the pillory wait for those who have the audacity to publish the secret infamies of the great. I can say no more; my mouth is closed by an authority I may not contend against. I must leave this side of my client's cause to your own imaginations, kindled and alert as they are with the love of liberty never to be extinguished in any English breast. Let us now turn to the legal aspects of the case. Here we are on safer ground, for not the most bigoted politician but respects the letter of the law. And I will show you, my lords and gentlemen of the jury, that, let the prosecution say what they will, they can bring nothing home to my client."

Serjeant Mortimer then proceeded to examine the legal aspects of the case and to pull to pieces the procedure of the prosecution. First the indictment was shown to be wrongly drawn, and in so many particulars that it seemed marvelous the Crown's advisers should be so ignorant of their business. Then he found fault with the place of trial. It appeared that it should not have been held in London at all; Kent was the scene of the plot, and unless convicted in Kent Friend could not be said to have been convicted at all. This was a very strong argument, and seemed to carry much weight with the rows of counsel sitting behind the bar. The wigged heads turned and conferred together upon it, and seemed thrown into some consternation; the two junior judges took notes with anxious brows, but Lord Mountstephen sat still and unmoved. And then much was made of the question of Overt Acts. Susan did not precisely understand what these were; but it seemed that because Friend had not been proved to have helped

a French soldier to land, or to have lighted a bonfire to guide the enemy—in short, as whatever he might have intended he had effected nothing—he could not have been guilty of any Overt Act, and that if he were not guilty of an Overt Act he was not guilty at all. And so, inch by inch, the ground was contested. She grew very weary before it was over, for what she longed to hear was that the damning correspondence could not be attributed to him; and no more was said on that point.

Witnesses were then called for the defense; but try as Serjeant Mortimer and his junior might, they could elicit nothing more from them than praise of the prisoner's character and the absence of suspicion. Mr. Hunt from the Admiralty was called, and admitted that he had supposed the prisoner to be an honest man, but guardedly said that he had really known very little of him. Of course his connection with the Romney Marsh smugglers was disclosed; but Mr. Mortimer in his speech summing up the defense, pointed out that the smuggling enterprise had no bearing on the question at trial and must not be allowed to influence the jury in their decision. The revelations of Friend's past made by the prosecution they were also to dismiss from their minds. "Gentlemen, I am not concerned to defend my client from these monstrous stories. Believe if you can that this man, this obscure individual, who is acknowledged even by those who now appear against him to have been diligent and unremitting in his attention to his duties, was at the same time coming and going between Ireland and France, corresponding with the Irish rebels and fomenting the insurrection of Emmett, and also conducting negotiations between the rash and unfortunate conspirators against Bonaparte, our own misguided participators in that disastrous affair, and the arch-enemy of all, the Emperor of the French. If

it were humanly possible that one man could undertake and carry through so much, so tortuous a web of intrigue, still, gentlemen, this is not the point at issue. You are not here to try my client for participation in the Irish rebellion; you are not here to decide his guilt or innocence in the Cadoudal affair; as my lord will tell you, you must banish these matters from your mind. They cannot affect the point at issue, which is the single question of this alleged Kentish attempt to procure the landing of Napoleon."

Serjeant Mortimer then passed on to recapitulate the technical points which formed the only genuine basis of his defense; for the attack on North and the suggestion of a powerful enemy plotting against Friend were not expected to effect anything but the bewilderment of the jury and the creation of that vague feeling of good will which Englishmen always entertain towards the oppressed. But the legal arguments, though not bearing on his actual guilt, would form if established a real ground for his acquittal; and were accordingly labored with all the acuteness and perseverance imaginable. The Serjeant concluded with an eloquent appeal to the Court to respect the letter of the law, even implying that it was better and safer for the country to set free an acknowledged traitor than to condemn him in a manner not strictly in accordance with precedent and technical exactitude; and after a brilliant invocation of the law as the bulwark of the British Constitution as well as the safeguard of individual liberty, he sat down. The members of the Bar in court were filled with admiration at the ingenuity and subtlety of the defense. It was a splendid effort, but a hopeless one. Had it been a civil case or one appealing less to popular feeling, it might have been successful; but here public resentment ran too high to allow the prisoner to escape on a technicality. Friend listened throughout with the closest

attention. Now and then he whispered to his attorney, suggesting a point or asking a question. His grasp of the law involved inspired his advisers with amazement, for the points he took were those the acutest lawyers would have seized.

At the close of Serjeant Mortimer's speech the Court adjourned. It was nearly four o'clock. On its return, the Attorney-General rose to reply for the Crown. Then all the ingenious sophistries and quibbles of the defense were swept away like cobwebs before the relentless exposure of the prosecution. The indictment was shown to be in order, the trial held in the right place—for though the rising was to have taken place in Kent, the plot was laid and the correspondence conducted in London—and the Overt Acts committed. Mr. Percival proved himself an acute lawyer in replying to the technical arguments of the defense; but he showed the real gist of the matter to be not in the points of law involved, and by a powerful appeal to the facts before them he lifted the question out of the region of legal quibbles into the atmosphere of common-sense and simple logic. With a few strong words he rehabilitated Will's character and restored his evidence to credence. He descended with crushing force on Serjeant Mortimer for his assertion that he dared not reveal the truth of the conspiracy against Friend for fear of the great names involved; he stigmatized the utterance as an audacious and unblushing slander on English justice, and reiterated that the speaker was self-condemned in saying it. His appeal was to English reason and English justice; and it was obvious that he easily carried the jury with him. After his speech the defense lost all its power, except with those who on professional grounds admired its daring and acumen.

The court was dark before he sat down. Candles were lighted when Lord Mountstephen proceeded to

sum up. His voice at first was a little uncertain. Some of the counsel remarked it and commented on it together in whispers. "Old Mountstephen is breaking up fast; he's getting a very old stager now." But he recovered himself as he went on: and there was no weakness apparent after he had once started. His grasp of the facts, his mastery of the law, were indeed apparent from the beginning. He crushed Serjeant Mortimer's contentions with a hand even heavier than that of the prosecution. He pointed out to the jury that the documentary evidence against the prisoner remained absolutely unshaken, and assured them that it was their plain duty to convict the prisoner. "Gentlemen, you will give what weight to the evidence it deserves; and if there be a single doubt remaining in your mind as to the prisoner's guilt, you will give him the benefit of that doubt";—how magnanimous he thought himself as he said it!—"but, gentlemen, I may assure you, that if you possess the intelligence which alone can entitle you to the responsible position you now hold, there can be no more doubt remaining in your minds. The points of law involved I have explained to you, and have shown exhaustively that they do not affect the prisoner's position, or that they are a misreading of the law and a misinterpretation of precedent. As patriots, as lovers of truth and justice, as Englishmen, it is your duty to protect your country from such diabolical and treacherous attempts as these; and I trust that by your verdict you will show that you realize the peril we have run, and the demand made by justice for a signal requital."

The jury then withdrew. Susan sighed, and looked round the court. Will came to her, craving for sympathy and consolation, and she felt him standing behind her; but she would not speak to him nor look at him. She could not forgive him. Besides, her thoughts were all engrossed with Friend.

He was chatting with his counsel. During the defense he had betrayed some anxiety when Serjeant Mortimer was slow in making some point he looked for, or appeared to forget an instance they had prepared together. When the speech was over he leant back and wiped his forehead; it was the only sign of emotion he showed. He listened to the reply of the prosecution and the summing up of the judge with attentive calm.

"Well, we've made a good fight, Mr. Friend," said Serjeant Mortimer.

"Yes, it was a pretty fight; I think we took every point it was possible to do. I say, Serjeant, we had a nice little dig at old Mountstephen, hey? I thoroughly enjoyed myself while you were laying into him."

"I don't think he enjoyed himself much," owned Serjeant Mortimer with a grim smile.

"No; I fancy you made him writhe a bit internally. Well, it's his turn now; but it consoles me a good deal to think that I've had my stroke at him. This may be of service to me afterwards, too. . . . By the way, Serjeant, I thought at the time you did not make quite enough of that case of *Rex versus Knight*. Couldn't you have put that point about the overt acts rather more strongly?"

"I don't think so, Mr. Friend. You see, after all, the case is not on all fours with yours."

"Well, you know best, of course. I should have thought it might have been made to square. But, after all, it would have made no difference to the result. Old Mountstephen made short work of all our labor."

"It is a defense that will be long remembered in legal circles, Mr. Friend, however it may result for you. I may say so without vanity, as it owes so much to your

own suggestions. From the lawyer's point of view we may congratulate ourselves."

"I'm obliged to you for your compliment, sir. And in fact it's all I expected to do—to give them a good run for their money," said Friend. "The result was a foregone conclusion from the first. I'm a cornered rat, hey? There's not a single soul here but is bent on hanging me—with the exception perhaps of the principal witness for the Crown."

"I fear—I greatly fear your chance is a small one."

"It's no chance at all, sir. I've no illusions on that point. I must build my hopes on what I can do afterwards. But I'm obliged to you all the same for your splendid efforts on my behalf. You have made a great exertion, and I'm sorry for your sake it was in so hopeless a cause. But your ingenuity and persistence will be amply recognized by your brothers at the bar. I saw the effect you made with the question of the place of trial."

"As to that, Mr. Friend, the defense was practically your own, you know."

"Oh, no, Serjeant; you can't say that. I'm only an amateur in the law. And you had the responsibility and fatigue of delivering it. Ah, here come the jury. They've not taken long. Now for it."

"I am glad you can meet the verdict with such courage, Mr. Friend."

"Oh, I'm game enough, Serjeant."

A rustle ran through the court, a stir of expectation. Silence was called for. A deep hush settled over the hall. The clerk of the arraigns called over the names of the jury. "Gentlemen, how say you? Do you find the prisoner at the bar, John Friend, guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty," replied the foreman.

There was a buzz, a roar, a yell of triumph from the

court. Friend remained calm; but his was the only unmoved countenance in the assembly. The very judges showed a decorous satisfaction, except for Lord Mountstephen, who permitted himself a remarkably malignant smile. Silence was at length restored, and Friend was put to the bar, and asked if he had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon him according to law.

"I have nothing to say," he replied, his magnificent voice ringing out deep and sonorous through the court. "Go on; do your worst. What you can inflict I can endure."

Lord Mountstephen drew on the black cap to pronounce sentence. Susan's eyes turned from one to the other, struck by the contrast they presented: the judge in his wig and robes, commanding and aristocratic in countenance, haughty and imposing in place and air; and Friend confronting him in the far more impressive dignity of defeat.

"John Friend," said Lord Mountstephen, "you have received a full and most impartial trial; and notwithstanding that the nature of your crime is one that, both on account of the danger you have drawn upon your country and the detestation it must infallibly breed in the heart of every loyal Englishman, might well have been rewarded with a summary punishment without stepping beyond the bounds of justice, you have yet been permitted to avail yourself of every intricacy of the law, and of every indulgence which its clemency offers to the innocent. But your devilish designs have fortunately through the mercy of God been brought to the light of day so clearly that no legal subterfuge or pretense of innocence can avail you. You have been found guilty by the unanimous voice of twelve of your countrymen, to whom even yourself after severest struggles could take no exception.

“ There is little need that I should dwell on the heinous nature of crimes that have brought a shudder to the soul of every inhabitant of this country, in order to mark the detestation felt towards them by the nation whose sovereign I here represent; but in view of your speedy appearance at a higher tribunal and in order to awaken your mind to a due sense of the awfulness of your guilt, it is my duty to point out to you the desperate nature of your crime. Born a happy subject of the most just, free, and merciful rule that ever raised a people to prosperity and glory, you have with damnable treason labored to subvert, overturn, and destroy the government whose paternal care insured you the very safety that enabled you to prosecute your nefarious designs. Seeking your own base advantage and for the despicable greed of filthy lucre you revolted from the loyalty you owed to the sacred person of your sovereign, you leagued yourself with his enemies, and sought to introduce the horrors of war and of a foreign foe into the peaceful bosom of your country. And to these black crimes you have added a malignancy and treachery of spirit, a callousness of conscience, a falsity and brutality of nature, that cast a deeper shade even upon treason itself, and would have justly won for you even in private life the abhorrence and detestation of all honest men. I can only trust that your hellish treasons being now unmasked and your true character displayed in all its depravity to the gaze of the world, the horror universally felt for such guilt will be a warning to the disaffected who still lurk among us; and that the awful sentence I am about to pronounce upon you may have a salutary effect upon their minds, and show to them the necessary consequences of a career of self-interest, disloyalty, and treason, which, be it soon or late, inevitably wins for its reward the fate you are now to meet, the fit ending of a life spent in treachery,

perjury, and the unspeakable vileness of the hired informer.

“It only remains to me now sincerely to exhort you, John Friend, to employ the short remainder of your earthly existence in the earnest endeavor to cleanse your sinful soul of its manifold crimes and wickedness, which must be greater than are known to any mortal man, that you may meet the awful hour of your death with a humility and penitence more befitting your condition than any assumed insensibility or bravado, and which alone can entitle you to the hope of finding mercy from your offended God. Recommending to you this last imperishable hope, I now pronounce upon you the sentence of the law on the foul crime of which you stand convicted; which sentence is, that you be taken back to the place from whence you came, and thence to the place of execution, and there be hanged by the neck, but not until you are dead; but that you be taken down again, and that whilst you are yet alive your bowels be taken out and burnt before your face; and that afterwards your head be severed from your body, and your body be divided into four quarters, and your head and quarters to be at the king’s disposal. And may Almighty God have mercy on your soul.”

“Amen!” replied John Friend, looking the judge full in the face. Lord Mountstephen scowled at him, and then hastily averted his eyes.

Friend was led away. Susan started up, trying to catch his eye before it was too late. It was already too late; he was gone. He had not seen her, or, seeing her, had given no sign of recognition. Wild with sorrow and with the long strain of emotion her smothered revolt suddenly boiled over. To break her bonds seemed a simple and easy thing. She touched Will on the shoulder.

“Good-by,” she said. “I am going home—home to

my mother—to my aunt Friend. Don't come after me; I have done with you; it is all over between us. I will never see you again. I must go back to her—I must go home to my mother. Dr. Bentley is here; he will take me." And before the stupefied Will could realize her meaning, she had signaled to Dr. Bentley and was making her way to him through the crowd.

CHAPTER XXVII

YOUTH AND EXPERIENCE

MRS. FRIEND had spent most of the interval between her husband's arrest and his trial in Westminster Abbey. Its quiet and seclusion were the greatest comfort to her. There she could remain without fear of pointing fingers and whispered words; there, secure in her own insignificance, she could join in the prayers of the Church, and in solitude pour out her own. Every morning Dr. Bentley took her in to the early service, and she generally spent the whole day there, never returning till dusk unless her cousin fetched her home and made her take some dinner. But on the day of the trial she would not go. "It is no place for me to-day," she said, in almost inaudible tones. "It is not among the honored and renowned dead that I can await my sentence. I cannot take my shame into the presence of their monuments." Dr. Bentley took her into St. Margaret's, the little church lying under the shadow of the Abbey; and there she spent the day. She did not dare to pray for an acquittal. The issue of the trial seemed almost to matter little; she was entirely absorbed in the thought of her husband's guilt. She had begged her cousin not to disturb her; and she remained there without food till the gathering darkness drove her home. Then Mrs. Bentley insisted on her making a meal. She took the food almost unconsciously, but ate a fair amount. She spent the second day in the same manner. Dr. Bentley brought news of how the trial was going.

The two cousins sat together in the drawing-room. It was seven o'clock. No news of the day's proceedings had reached them. They said little. "How long will it take them to get here from the Old Bailey?" asked Mrs. Friend once. And once Mrs. Bentley said, "Don't you think, dear Mary, it may be a hopeful sign if the trial lasts a long while?" Mrs. Friend shook her head. She had no hope. Or if indeed, through some juggle of the law or miracle of mismanagement, an acquittal should be secured, what difference would it make to her real woe? Her husband would be none the less a traitor to be abhorred of all men. It might indeed give him a longer space for repentance; but was John Friend the man to repent because he had escaped from an apparently inevitable destruction? She could almost hear his laugh of triumph, his chuckling delight; and she shivered at the thought. Better anything; better death than that!

A dreadful restlessness overtook her as the evening wore on. She could not keep still. Once or twice she went out to the hall and listened at the door. There was no sound of approaching wheels or footsteps. She came back to the drawing-room and tried to control herself; her foot worked against the floor; her fingers twisted themselves together. Surely it must be over by now! Again she rose to go and listen for wheels, but stopped herself. "Margaret, dearest, I am very restless. I think I will go upstairs. I must not make you miserable with my impatience."

"No, dearest, stay here, unless you think you would be easier upstairs. I do not mind what you do. Walk about as much as you like."

"I can't keep still!" said Mrs. Friend, half smiling sadly. "I will go to my room; I can fidget there with a better conscience."

"If you would rather, dearest, do."

Mrs. Friend went upstairs and shut herself into her

room. She walked up and down restlessly: then she threw herself on her knees, and resolved to keep still even if she could not pray. She grew a little calmer.

At last, soon after nine o'clock, a coach drove up to the door. She ran downstairs and reached the hall before Mrs. Bentley had got out of the drawing-room. She opened the door, and Susan threw herself into her arms.

As they embraced, Mrs. Bentley looked inquiringly at her husband. He shook his head sadly. There was no need for further words. Dr. Bentley led the way into the drawing-room. Susan was sobbing wildly. "She is overwrought," said Dr. Bentley in a low tone. "It has been a long, exhausting day. Get her some cordial, my dear; or some white wine whey, and some light food. You must want something too"; and by "you" he meant to include Mrs. Friend.

Mrs. Bentley gave the orders and returned. Susan was still sobbing uncontrollably; she would not let go her aunt's hand. Mrs. Friend was quite calm; she tried to soothe Susan and hush her sobs. "She is worn out," she said, looking at her cousin with eyes that seemed to have grown sunken and hollow. "She ought to go to bed; she needs rest. You will let me have my child to sleep with me to-night? You will share my bed, Susan?"

"Take her upstairs, dear; and we will send a tray to you."

Mrs. Friend took Susan to her bedroom. She seated her in a chair and took off her bonnet and cape, murmuring words of endearment as if she had been a child. "O aunt! You must not wait on me! Don't!" cried Susan through her sobs as her aunt unfastened her plaits of hair and began to brush it out.

"Let me, my darling. There is still this comfort left me."

"O aunt! Mother, mother, mother! You have been a mother to me all my life. Let me stay with you, mother!"

"Surely, dearest. Where is Will? I don't think I saw him."

"No. I have left him. I have come back to you, dearest mother. Take me in and let me stay with you; I have no one but you now."

"You are tired out, dear child. How late it is! Was the—were they so long in finishing?"

"Yes, so long. It is over, dear mother. Can I ever forgive myself?"

"Child, you are worn out. Let me wash your face for you. I shall think you are a child again, Susan,—the little child of four you were when I first had you."

The maid knocked at the door with a tray of white wine whey and toast and biscuits. Mrs. Friend took it in and fed Susan as if she had been an infant. "But you must take some yourself, mother," said the girl. Mrs. Friend shared it with her.

Susan gradually stopped crying, and Mrs. Friend unfastened her clothes and helped her into bed. "I ought to have undressed you on your wedding night, Susan," she said. "I must do it now instead."

"O mother, mother, it is all over," cried Susan. "I love him no more. I have left him; I will never see him again."

"Tell me all, my child. Wait till I am in bed, and then you shall lie in my arms and tell me everything. Let me tuck you up comfortably—so. Is that right?"

"O mother, mother dear!" cried Susan, bursting into tears again.

Mrs. Friend made haste to undress and join Susan. The girl held out her arms as she got into bed and folded her in her embrace. "Susan," she whispered. "First tell me about him."

"He was grand; he was magnificent! Mother, I cannot forgive myself for having joined his enemies. It is I and my husband who have killed him."

"No, dear; you must not say that. You must not blame Will. Did he seem affected by his position at all?"

"Not in the least. No one could have thought he was being tried for his life. He was quite calm; quite at his ease. He did not seem to notice when the people yelled at him. And when—when Lord Mountstephen pronounced the sentence—" she shuddered at the recollection—"he looked him full in the face, steadily, with a little disdainful smile, till he had to look away."

"And did he show any—did he show no sign of compunction?"

"No, not a sign," said Susan. "Only when Lord Mountstephen had finished the sentence, and said 'And may Almighty God have mercy on your soul,' he replied 'Amen.' But proudly, and as if he defied them all to do their worst."

Mrs. Friend sighed. "We need not pray that he may have strength to bear his fate, Susan," she said. "He has strength enough."

"O mother, mother, and we have destroyed him!"

"Dear love, you must not let yourself think that. No one could have harmed him if he had not first betrayed his country."

"I seem to be unable to remember it," sighed Susan. "He is so grand a man that I can't help forgiving him whatever he has done."

"And your husband, dearest; how did he stand the trial?"

"He did not stand it; he could not stand it. It was terrible. It all came out about all my guardian had done for him, and how in return he betrayed him. It was dreadful. And he looked so—such a weakling!"

"Dearest, think what a painful position it was for him. It was his very sensitiveness that made him suffer. You should have pity on him."

"I could not, when I saw him shuffling and ashamed. Oh, it was a terrible scene, aunt. I was ashamed of him."

"You, my love, ashamed of him?"

"Yes, dear aunt. I am ashamed of him. He is not what I thought he was; he is weak;—weak throughout."

"And you have made up your mind to leave him?"

"What can I do? I do not love him any longer. He has killed my love. I believed him to be noble, strong, good. He is not; he is weak and contemptible."

"But he is good, Susan."

"I don't think he is good. He hasn't the strength to be good by himself. O aunt, I have been so miserable!" She began to weep again.

"He was not unkind to you, Susan?"

"No. He loves me—after his way. But—he has been very cruel, brutal, to me. It is his weakness. I despise weakness."

"Tell me, dearest, just how it was."

"I can't. If I only could! But it is one of the things that cannot be told."

"Tell me something, dear."

"I can tell you this—that while we were with Lord Mountstephen he got intoxicated one night. He came to me in bed, drunk."

"He was very sorry for it afterwards, love, was he not?"

"Yes; but what good was that? Could he not keep sober for his wife to whom he had not been married a fortnight?"

"Dear child, you have seen so little of the world; you do not know how common a thing it is in society. It

is often very hard, almost impossible for a man to avoid drinking more than is good for him."

"It is just the hard things that I value. What do I care for easy tests? But he cannot keep a promise."

"Can he not, dear? What promise did he break to you?"

"Can I tell you? Oh, I can't!"

"If it would comfort you, do, dear. You are quite safe with me. I might help you."

"But it is so shocking."

"I shall not be shocked."

"I should like to tell you. If only I could! Well. . . . You remember how he asked me to marry him hurriedly, in a week's time?"

"Yes."

"I did not want to consent—I *could* not, so hastily. But it seemed so urgent—I had such need of a protector, and I so dreaded being forced into any other protection than his—that—I consented—on a condition."

"And that was?"

"That we should remain husband and wife only in name until—until I chose. I wanted to be older—I felt too young."

"Yes, love. And he agreed?"

"Yes. He thought a year too long to wait—but he promised me it should not be till I was ready."

"Yes, love. And then?"

"And then we were married, and we started on our journey to Lord Mountstephen's house, and at first it was all right. But the second night——"

"Yes, dearest?"

"When we got to the inn it was full, and there was only one room we could have. And I did not want to make any fuss—it had been so unpleasant the night before at the other inn—so I told him I would allow him to sleep with me, never dreaming he would break

his promise. But he thought—he supposed—that I meant—differently. And—and—— O aunt, he was brutal! I cried, I cried; I begged and beseeched—oh, oh, oh!” She covered her face in her hands and buried herself out of sight in the bedclothes.

“Poor Susan! poor little child!”

“Do you think I ought ever to have forgiven him, aunt?” she demanded, suddenly sitting upright.

“Yes, my love,” replied Mrs. Friend slowly; “I think you ought to have forgiven him.”

“Why, aunt? When he broke the most solemn promise—the very condition on which I married him?”

“Dear child, you know so little of men. If you had known, you could never have expected that he could share your bed and yet keep his promise. I will not say no man could; I know one who could; but there is not one man in a thousand, Susan, who could bear that best. You do not know what a strain you put him to. You ought to forgive him.”

“But, aunt, I begged him,—I prayed, I wept——”

“And it only inflamed him the more? Susan, we must not judge men by ourselves. I do not mean to defend Will. I do not mean that when a man has passed his word, there is any possible temptation which can excuse his breaking it. There is not. But you should remember, dearest, that you did nothing to help him in his strait. It was you who made it difficult for him to keep his word.”

“I did not know—I never guessed——”

“I know. Poor child, you were too young. It was not your fault; but, dear, you should have mercy. He pays for it more dearly than you.”

“He? He does not suffer!”

“Has he not, Susan, from the withdrawal of your love?”

“Ah, but I cannot help that.”

"Might not he plead he could not help——? We can always help, Susan."

"Besides, that is the just, the natural consequence. He does not deserve that I should feel the same towards him."

"Perhaps not; but, after all, why did you marry him? Was it only because he deserved it?"

"I thought he was good, and so I loved him."

"And do you really not love him now? You vowed, Susan, to take him for better or for worse; to love him, comfort him, cherish him. Did you mean to do so only so long as he satisfied your demands—did you take a conditional vow? And now, when you find he has far greater need of you than you knew of, when you find that he has a will that needs strengthening and weakness that you could support, will you cast him from you remorselessly? After all, dear, what has he done to you? You were prepared to be his wife some time or other. Will you retract your marriage oath because you are called on before you expected?"

"It is not that," said Susan. "It was his brutal callousness—as if my feelings did not matter—as if he enjoyed humbling me."

"Again, dear, you must forgive a man his nature. That is not your husband's real character; you don't find him careless of your feelings in daily life. His fault is lack of self-control; when carried away by his passions he falls far below what he should be; but, love, you should not judge him by his fall. No man loves and honors his wife more, or is more regardful of her feelings, than he does when he is in his right mind, Susan."

"But it shows such weakness. I cannot help despising him."

"Dear, you may be sure of one thing—he loves you with all his strength. It is not many wives who can

boast of such an attachment. His is a most loving nature; a sensitive, finely-strung, sincere, and honest nature; open to every good impulse, easily swayed, but far more by good than by bad, Susan. You have proved his weakness; you have not proved his strength. His soul lies in your hands. What will you do with it?"

Susan groaned. "I wanted a master; a husband who would guide and rule and strengthen me. I wanted to put my soul into his hands."

"Dear Susan, few of us are permitted to do that. We all have to learn to rule our souls alone; to be a strength to ourselves."

"But you want me to take charge of my husband's soul; to find strength for him."

"To help him, to stand by him, love; he must find strength for himself. But suppose you were the stronger and could find strength for him, Susan; would you refuse? You have promised to love him; would it be loving, would it be generous, to leave him to fight his battles alone?"

"But it seems that is what he leaves me to do."

"Perhaps it does in this battle, dear; but there are so many battles, and most have to be fought alone. But trust him, and you will find his strength supporting you in many a battle, even where you look for it least."

"Shall I? Even after this?"

"Yes, my love, assuredly. You must not think that he is worthless because you have once found him weak."

"But it is so hard," said Susan. "I believed in him so deeply! Now I have found he is not what I thought him, he does not seem the man I loved. He is merely—merely a mortal like myself. He may have good qualities, but how can I love him? One does not love a patchwork of good qualities and weaknesses; one wants to adore, to worship!"

"Ah, dear Susan, there is no one without weaknesses

and human imperfections. If you had married the greatest hero that ever lived, you would have found him in time to be merely a mortal like yourself. It is only by keeping at a distance that we can believe any one to be without human weakness. You make the mistake so many young girls do! You must not expect to worship a faultless being in a husband; you must content yourself with loving a patchwork of good qualities. And surely, dear, your patchwork is a very lovable one!"

"I am too weak myself," said Susan. "You cannot understand; it has been so different with you. You do not know what it is to have to despise your husband."

"O Susan! You don't know what you are saying. You will never, never in all your life suffer as I have suffered. *You* will have no cause to despise your husband." The agony in her voice pierced Susan's heart.

"Oh, forgive me, dearest! I forgot! I forgot!"

"You think, Susan, that weakness is the only thing to be despised in a man? You think that because my husband is strong, that you may envy me? Child, child, how little you know!"

"But, dearest aunt—mother, rather—tell me, if it does not give you too much pain—you never felt as I do now? You never felt as if you must cut yourself adrift—cast off your husband even if it tore your heart in two?"

"I believe I did, Susan, once. It is so long ago that I have nearly forgotten it. But there was a time when I felt just as you do now; when I vowed to myself I must cut myself adrift, even though I died of the parting."

"Tell me, mother dearest."

"I had been married about five or six months. It was when I first confessed to myself what manner of man my husband was. Susan, you have been disappointed in your husband; you have found him not what

you dreamt. You have no conception what my feelings were. I had not woven fanciful dreams around him; I was older than you are; I was nearly four-and-twenty; life was a reality to me. And, instead of the man I believed in, I found my husband sordid and scheming, indifferent to religion, regardless of honor, insensible to ideals; aiming only at money and position and low, mercenary objects. He cared nothing for all that was dearest to me. All that he cared for I despised. I did not know then, I did not guess, at his treasonable intrigues; perhaps he had not then begun them; but I saw enough to make it no surprise to me, whatever depth of baseness the future might reveal." Her voice sank till it was almost inaudible. "Dear, you think your husband weak. I had to acknowledge mine to be a bad, an unprincipled man. I felt my life had become impossible. I told myself, as you do now, that all my love was dead. I felt myself degraded by sharing the life of such a man. And I debated long with myself whether it were not my duty to leave him."

"You did not leave him, aunt? What determined you to stay?"

"No, I never left him, dear; thank God. That was before he brought you home to me. And it was just then, when I was debating whether I ought not to leave him, that God sent a new tie to keep me in my place. I had the hope then, for a few short months, of bearing a child."

"Aunt! you never did—you never had a child?"

"No, my love. The hope did not last long. I was very ill; it was the first of my illnesses. I was ill for months, and he nursed me more tenderly than any woman. I lay helpless on his hands like an infant, and he nursed me back to life. When I recovered I saw my duty clear; I recognized that it was indeed the hand of God that had joined us together."

“And were you always happy after that?”

“Happy? How could I be happy, dearest? I loved him; I loved him better and better every year, every day that passed; it only increased my suffering on account of his want of principle. One happiness I had, and one alone, to pray for the opening of his eyes.”

“And I—was I not a happiness to you?”

“Yes, my Susan; I must not forget you. You were a deep delight to me; but chiefly, I fear—oh me, I fear because I thought his adoption of you showed some softening of his heart—I believed it to be one act at least of real disinterested benevolence. Oh me, if I had known the truth!”

“How could you have lived, aunt? To suffer so much, and to live without happiness—and without hope——”

“But not without love. Child, as one grows older one ceases to demand happiness insistently as one does in youth. I remember when I thought I could not live without happiness. But one hardly asks for it in middle age. I learnt how to live, and how to love, and was content.”

“How, aunt? Teach me.”

“The secret is simple, my child: unwearied love, and patience, and prayer. Those three, unending stores of those three, will bear one up through any misery in marriage.”

“But, aunt, how is it possible to love one whom you cannot admire—cannot even respect? Isn’t there something degrading about such a love?”

“I think not, dearest, if one holds to one’s standard through all, and lets one’s tenderness and desire to think well of the object of one’s love never for an instant to blind one to right and wrong. Is it not thus that we approach most nearly to the Divine Love? No; there is nothing degrading in love of the sinner while we do not

excuse the sin. Love is hard on these conditions; but all things are possible to prayer. Unending charity, Susan, inexhaustible love and tenderness—they are the whole secret of life. For in love we live and move and have our being.”

“But, aunt, that is not love of—that is not the love men and women feel for each other when they marry.”

“No, dear; but it is the love that married love should grow into if it is to bear its full result. All love is one, Susan; and the passion of lovers is the root of the love that flowers in Christ.”

“Aunt, I shall never be as good as you are.”

“I am not good, Susan. If I have learnt any wisdom, it has been through suffering. And, my love, if you have to suffer, you will also learn—I pray that you may learn the wisdom and the charity that suffering brings.”

“O aunt! How hard life is!” groaned Susan. “How can you——? How shall I ever attain to your goodness?”

“Dearest, the way of love is not hard. You will not find it hard. It is not as if your husband, any more than mine, were an unlovable character. You have only to throw aside your false ideals. I do not know how it would have been with me if my husband had not had qualities which compelled my love. It is no merit in me to have loved him: no one could have helped it. For if he has no principles, surely he has every other virtue a man can possess. I have spoken hard things of him, Susan; it is my sorrow that if I am true to my standards I must be false to my love. But though I may call him base and unprincipled and mercenary—as God knows, indeed, he has been—I can also call him with a clear and joyful conscience the bravest, most generous, most magnanimous of men. Shall I tell you, love, of all his goodness to me; of the goodness that may not be spoken

of, so rare and sacred a thing it is? Will it not atone, O God, will it not atone, that if he has been false to his king and his country, he was true, sublimely true, to his wife?

"I told you, my love, how long an illness followed the loss of the child that was never born to us. Other illnesses followed; in the succeeding years I lost my health completely. At last the physician told me that another pregnancy would cost me my life; that if I were to live I must cease to be a wife. I was willing to sacrifice my life for him; what meaning had it to me apart from my duty to him? And what better fate—what sweeter and lovelier death could there be, than to die for his sake and by our love?

"But 'twas impossible, for I was thinking of myself alone; I forgot what his part in such a course would be. Being the man he is, he would not suffer it. What did he say to me? He said with a look I shall never forget—a look that would make me a Heaven in the midst of Hell—and O God, if he is not saved, will make a Hell for me in Heaven: 'What do you suppose I love you for, Polly? Do you fancy it can make the slightest difference?' And since then—for five long years, Susan—he has loved me not less, but more."

Susan could not speak.

"And it has not been easy for him, Susan.¹ I, who would so gladly have suffered for him, have had to stand by and know myself the cause of suffering—only his love will not admit there is any suffering in what he bears for my sake. O my God, my God, how often have I prayed to die for him, if so his heart might be softened! And now it is not my agony but his own that is demanded: he must pay himself, himself, with his own

¹ Dear Mrs. Friend! You ought to acknowledge it was only by intuition that you divined it was hard. You know that neither by word nor sign did your husband ever betray it.

death, not mine. It is just, it is just; but how am I to bear it; unless in the knowledge that Thou wilt open his eyes at the last, that Thou takest his life in exchange for his soul? O Susan, Susan, pray with me; we will yield up his life without a murmur if by so doing we may save his soul."

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN THE MORNING

EARLY the next morning, a little before eight o'clock, Will North knocked at the door. Susan was sleeping profoundly; Mrs. Friend was up and dressed. She went down to meet him and led him into the dining-parlor. He looked haggard and miserable beyond words; he had been pacing the streets all night.

"My poor Will, what you have suffered!" exclaimed Mrs. Friend.

"Don't speak of me; it is not my sufferings that matter. I deserve them all, all, and far more than all," said Will desperately. "Mrs. Friend, you can never forgive me."

"Be sure I can, dear boy. Don't accuse yourself, Will; you have nothing to blame yourself for."

"No, when I have destroyed your husband—when I have betrayed my friend who trusted me?"

"He did not trust you, Will; he reposed no confidence in you. Sit down, my dear, and let us talk calmly. You and Susan are so carried away by admiration for his courage and sorrow for his fate that you are forgetting what he really is. He was not a man to put confidence in any one. He used you for his own purposes as long as he chose, and it was a mere accident that enlightened you. There was no betrayal. You must not reproach yourself."

"It remains that he, the bravest, the most generous

of men, is to die a shameful and horrible death, and that I, who brought it on him, live."

"But, Will, think what would have happened if you had tried to screen him. His death may cause us agony who love him; but what is that to our agony if he had been successful? Now we have hopes that he may yet be saved; his death may be—I trust, I believe it will be—the means of awakening his soul. What grace or pardon could we look for if his treason had been carried through to its end?"

"You think only of his soul, Mrs. Friend. I, who saw him——"

"Don't fear that his bodily courage or strength will fail him, Will. If you saw him, I know you did not see him cast down or dismayed. No one will. His strength will suffice him."

"And it is such a man that I have destroyed!"

"Don't think too highly of his courage, Will. It cannot cleanse his soul. Pray for him—pray for him while there is yet time."

"I—pray for him?" Will dropped his head into his hands.

"Mrs. Friend," he began presently, suddenly lifting it, "what does Susan say of me? You have seen her?"

"Yes; she is upstairs, sleeping. It was very late before she went to sleep."

"And what does she say of me, Mrs. Friend?"

"She has had a severe shock, Will. She is very young; and she has suffered much."

"Not what I have. How can she? She has nothing to reproach herself with. Will she ever forgive me, do you think?"

"I believe she will; but you must be patient with her, Will. She is very young; it is barely three months since she was a child."

"Oh, I have been a brute to her! I do not deserve

ever to be forgiven. Will she cast me off, do you think?"

"I think not. But you must give her time, Will; you must be very gentle with her. You are too young yourself to be a husband. 'Tis a relation that needs infinite patience, infinite forbearance."

"If she will have patience with me—if she will give me another trial——. Why do you speak of my forbearance with her, Mrs. Friend? It is I who have sinned against her; she is stainless."

"Beware, dear Will, of idealizing her. She is human like yourself. Her failings are not yours; it may be you fall before the grosser temptations which she does not feel; but she has her own difficulties which you will discover by-and-by, and maybe have less patience with, than the faults you can understand more readily. You may find her hard in judgment upon you; slow to understand and to forgive. But she is so young. Forgiveness and comprehension come with years."

"She cannot be harder on me than I am on myself. I see myself too base to live. Oh, why cannot I take his place, and end my wretched life by redeeming his? Then I might hope to be forgiven."

"No, no, Will. You forget. He must pay for his own crimes; well do I believe he will redeem his soul in paying. It is best as it is. I say so, who suffer most. But you, dear son, you must live your life. You have something to redeem; you must do it by honest, continued effort. Do not lose courage; do not lose hope; time will be your friend. You will regain Susan; you will make yourself worthy of her love. But, Will, you must give your whole heart to the effort."

"I will, I will. If I have the hope of regaining her, I can do anything. O, Mrs. Friend, I will try."

"God bless you, dear Will, and give you strength. Now I will go and fetch Susan."

She went upstairs. Susan was awake, and was dressing. Mrs. Friend told her who was below.

"O aunt! I cannot see him."

"He wants you, Susan."

"So soon! I do not know what to say to him."

"Hear what he says to you."

"I know what he will say. He will be very sorry, very penitent; and then he will go and offend again."

"Have patience with him, Susan. He will never want to offend; he will never find happiness or peace in erring. You can help him to be what he wants."

"O aunt! O aunt! I am too young and weak to have this thrust upon me." Susan sat down in a chair and began to cry.

"You love him, dear. And he loves you—how dearly! God have given you to each other to help and strengthen each other. Trust your love, dearest; you will find it guides you. And even where you least look for it, you will find him able to guide and strengthen you."

"Shall I, aunt?"

"Yes indeed, my love. Do not think scornfully of him. You have a fine man, a fine nature, in your husband."

Susan allowed herself to be led downstairs. Mrs. Friend opened the door of the dining-parlor and took her in. "Here she is, Will," she said. Then she left them to themselves.

Susan stole a glance at her husband and was struck with compassion at the misery of his face. His eyes were fixed on her with the humble entreaty of a dog. "Susan—Susan!" he murmured. "Can you ever forgive me?"

Her heart melted. She saw only the man she had loved, suffering and in need of her. She held out her arms to him without a word. He rushed to her, and sank on her breast in a passion of tears.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE NATURAL MAN

JOHN FRIEND was led back to prison at the conclusion of his trial, and immediately demanded a fried steak and onions for his supper.

"Well," said the turnkey, "you're a cool customer, Mr. Friend, I must say. I've seen a many gents come out from sentence, and there was plenty as was game enough and didn't let on to care a damn; but you're the first as ever I heard call for a fried steak and onions within ten minutes of being cast to hang by the neck till you was dead."

"But not till I am dead; there's just the difference, don't you see?" chuckled Friend. "There's a further treat reserved for me after the hanging. No wonder I am in good spirits. Hurry up that steak and onions."

"Now, don't you bother your head about the disemboweling, Mr. Friend. They never carries that out nowadays. If they cut off your head it'll be as much as they'll do, and not till you've hung for a good half-an-hour, by which time there's not as much breath left in a man's body as'll wag his little finger. You'll be as dead as mutton afore you're taken down for the heading and quartering."

"A most reassuring prospect," said Friend. "Where's my supper? I assure you a man's in want of a good supper after eleven hours in the dock. I wish old Mountstephen as good an appetite as mine."

"You'll have a litte taste o' something comfortable

to keep your heart up, Mr. Friend? You've got the night afore you; and though you show a fine spirit now, there's not many can sleep the night through after being found guilty. You'll be glad of a drop o' Dutch courage before the morning."

"Not I, Manning. English courage is enough for me."

"Pity you worn't a true-spirited Englishman all through. Can't think what a fine game fellow like you wants to go over to them d—d nasty frog-eating Frenchies for. If it hadn't been for that, you might ha' been walking free at your ease at this minute."

"We never know what's waiting to befall us, do we, Manning? Now you've never had anything to do with nasty frog-eating Frenchies, I'll be found; yet I wouldn't be so much surprised if some little accident some day should land you here where I stand, beneath the gallows. You look out, my boy. These little incidents are not so easily avoided."

"Now, you're joking, Mr. Friend. But won't you take a little glass of spirits if I fetch it?"

"No, thanks, Manning. Fetch it for yourself at my expense, if you like. If you could get me a glass of clean cold water, I should enjoy it; but that's a thing I presume Newgate can't supply."

"Water!" Ah, you love your joke, you do, Mr. Friend. Blast me if ever I heard of a man drinking water before."

"Well, Manning, every man to his taste. You can fetch me a pint of ale, if you'll be so kind."

As the turnkey left on the errand, his fellow lounged in, a surly man with an irascible temper and abusive tongue, in whose presence he found it wise to hold his peace. The steak soon arrived, but his appetite disappeared at the sight of it. It is true that the cookery was revolting. He ate a few mouthfuls and then pushed

the dish away. His brain was spinning with ideas of possible chances for him yet; but he felt too tired to decide if they were practical or the merest illusions. The two jailers wrangled beside him. Their language was filthy. The sullen one was in a vile temper.

"Well, gentlemen, I will bid you good night," said Friend. "Pray continue your very interesting conversation without reference to me. I am going to sleep. I hope I shan't disturb you."

The surly jailer damned him for a bloody treacherous mounser; the other one wished him good night with civility, and a fresh wrangle arose over this difference in manners. Friend tried to close his ears to them, but in vain. Whether it was their disturbance, or that he was affected in spite of himself by his position, he could not sleep. Long after all was silent in the cell he remained awake.

In the morning he received a visit from his attorney, Mr. Edwards. That gentleman wore a most lugubrious face, partly as appropriate to the occasion, and partly as the genuine expression of his feelings. For all who came in contact with Friend found themselves liking him, however strong their prepossessions against him had been. Friend laughed at him. "Oh, I'm not dead yet, Mr. Edwards. Time enough to pull so long a face when the breath's out of my body."

"I fear the case is almost as desperate, Mr. Friend."

"Oh, I don't know about that. There are plenty of schemes I can try yet. I want to talk some of them over with you, Mr. Edwards. There's of course the petition game; that's rather a forlorn hope, and yet I don't know if I couldn't work it so as to stand me a chance. But that's not a matter in which you can help me. What I'm chiefly thinking of now is this business of Lord Mountstephen's. Can't we memorialize the king or Prince of Wales or some influential personage,

setting forth that he is the private enemy referred to by my counsel at the trial, and making out that his sentence was just the outcome of private malice?’

“You mean to petition for another trial?”

“Oh no, no; heaven forbid! Of course, another trial would have the same result. No; can’t we get the sentence set aside on the grounds of his avowed enmity to me?”

“I’m afraid there’s not a chance of it, Mr. Friend. Of course, if you’d brought up the matter before the trial——”

“What good would that have been, my dear sir? My conviction was a matter of pure certainty, whoever tried me once those unluckly papers had come to light. No; what I wanted was to be tried by old Mountstephen, and then to take advantage of his known grudge against me. Young North acknowledged in the most handsome manner that he’d heard him threaten my life. Surely that gives me a handle.”

“But, Mr. Friend, how much of the story are you willing to publish? If once you challenge Lord Mountstephen, the facts are bound to come out; and you surely don’t wish that the whole history of your relations with him should become known.”

“Oh, it will be quite easy to give the facts the necessary twist. There’s nothing against me in writing, you know—unless he has kept my letters, which is out of the question. There was no forgery; it fortunately wasn’t necessary. Oh, trust me for making myself out an innocent victim! I wish I saw nothing more difficult than that.”

“Well, Mr. Friend, seriously I must say that I’m afraid you have no chance. Of course, if your object is to revenge yourself on Lord Mountstephen, you can do it. There is no doubt you have it in your power to raise a very ugly scandal; but that it would benefit

yourself in any way I'm afraid I must absolutely deny."

"Are you sure of that, Mr. Edwards, speaking as a lawyer? He's a noted Tory, you know. Working all the popular feeling against him (that was a good touch of Mortimer's about my being poor and friendless, wasn't it?) appealing to the masses, and protesting against the privilege and tyranny of the upper classes, you know, and so on. Of course, we'll sink the French business as far as possible. After all, old Boney has his admirers. Come now, Mr. Edwards—don't you think it would be worth trying?"

"You can try it, of course, Mr. Friend. Anything you like that can keep up your spirits. But——"

"Oh, if it's only to keep up my spirits I shan't trouble myself. I can keep up my spirits, thank goodness, without any trickery. Well, I must think of something else. There are plenty of other ways. Oh, I'm not cast down, Mr. Edwards. Never say John Friend is done for till you've seen him dead."

"You are a man of marvelous resource, Mr. Friend; but in this case I fear—— However, I would not say a word to depress you. By the way, to turn to another subject, I should like to inquire if you will permit me, why you stopped your counsel when he was on the point of getting at those very damaging facts about the past life of the prosecution's principal witness."

"He's a good lad; I didn't want him tormented. It does seem folly on my part, but it made no difference in the end. Nothing could have effected the result."

"I suppose not; and yet all the way through it was your policy to avail yourself of every chance, whether there was a hope or not."

"True; it was my policy, and I ought to have stuck to it. I confess I am a fool in regard to that young man. If I hadn't been, I shouldn't be here now. I had him under my knee—only to fire a pistol or drive a knife

home, and I should have been safe. What idiotic weakness possessed me I can't think. But I have a vein of softness about me somewhere; I'm not always to be trusted. The Emperor—old Boney, you know—warned me of it long ago. 'Take care you always keep your private feelings apart from business, my friend,' he said to me, 'or you'll come to grief one fine day.' Well, that day has arrived. I neglected his advice, and this you see is the result. Oh, he has an eye for men, has the Emperor Boney. Here I am, ruined by my d—d nature."

"At least it is a satisfaction to you to know that you have not young North's death upon your conscience."

"Conscience! I don't know the article, my dear sir. And as for young North, I know no reason why his life should be dearer to me than my own. Of course a man's life is his first concern; and I think him an idiot who throws his away for a scruple. Oh, I've no patience with my folly. But it doesn't bear thinking of. I ought to know better at my age than to think of what's done and can't be mended. There's nothing stifles and chokes me so much as to sit and think. I'd sooner hang; upon my word I would. So with your leave we'll change the subject. Fortunately there's still a future to look to."

"A short one, I'm afraid."

"Well, much may be done in a short space."

"Mr. Friend, I would not depress your spirits; and if there were any legitimate grounds for hope I should be the last man to dash them from you; but I cannot help assuring you that you are deceiving yourself if you think that any human power or ingenuity can save your life now. I am vastly grieved for you; I lament your fate from my heart; but I can only advise you to make up your mind to undergo the worst."

"Thank you, Mr. Edwards; I think I'm equal to it, whatever comes. But you don't know me if you think I can sit down and fold my hands and cry out that all's

up with me, just because the law has done its worst. I shall not give up hope while a breath remains in my body. I don't believe I have a chance; I did not believe I had a chance before the trial; but none the less I shall fight to the last. What, man! A man is not to give up his life without a struggle!"

"Not while a hope remains. But when the case is desperate, then it becomes a man best to submit."

"Well, Mr. Edwards, I've been in some straits worthy to be called desperate before, and yet I have always found I've escaped in the end, and even turned them sometimes to my advantage. To throw up your hands and cry out that the case is desperate is always the worst policy. There never yet was a case so bad that I couldn't make the best of it."

"But when it comes to the gallows, Mr. Friend?"

"When it comes to the gallows, Mr. Edwards, you see if I can't make the best of that too! Yes; there's something left, when hope is gone."

"There is a hope, Mr. Friend——" said the attorney in a hurried, shamefaced manner; "but there are others who will speak to you of that better than I can; these things are not in my line at all. But I can't see a man like you going to perdition without a word; you know where to turn—if you'll forgive me for referring to it."

"Thanks, Mr. Edwards; but that sort of thing isn't in my line either. Did you ever hear greater hypocrisy in your life than old Mountstephen recommending me to repentance and humility? He was a happy man over that sentence. How he gloated over the details!"

"I can't defend his manner; but if you could turn your thoughts into other channels, Mr. Friend, it would be better for you."

"Oh, I've nothing to lose now. The satisfaction of thinking of it is all I'm likely to get. Hypocritical old villain! I don't mean to say it would have made any

difference whoever sat on the bench; but this I say, that if ever a man on this earth thirsted for another's blood and worked his hardest for his death, Lord Mountstephen at my trial was that man. Ah, it would be a distinct satisfaction to me to wring his neck with my own hands!"

"I am sorry this should be your frame of mind——"

"Come, Mr. Edwards, don't pretend to be shocked. You know perfectly well he did his utmost to murder me, and it wouldn't be natural if I didn't feel it. There's an old score between us. However, it is useless to pursue the subject. I am here, and he is there; and upon my word I wouldn't change places with him. You mark my words Mr. Edwards; he'll come to see me hanged."

"It would be a most unbecoming thing to a man in his position; the idea's impossible; he could never do it."

"He will; you may depend upon it. He'll never be happy till he's seen the last of me. Well, 'tis the fortune of war! I'd twist his neck if I had got the chance. Heaven only knows which of us two is the greater rogue. And it's something to know I have still the power to do him an ill turn."

"If you decide on exercising your power, Mr. Friend, rely on my services to do all I can for you. I have discharged my conscience in telling you frankly I believe it will do you no service; but if you think it worth while to try, I conceive it my duty still to aid you to the utmost of my power, by every constitutional means."

"Thank you, thank you heartily, Mr. Edwards. But I don't know. You see, the old rascal is my Susan's grandfather, and she's closely associated with him now. I don't want to do anything that would cause her pain. Of course, if I saw a chance of getting off myself, I'd do it; but merely for the sake of making myself disagreeable to him—I don't fancy it's worth it. Well, I'll consider it. Something depends on what other ideas

occur to me. But thanks all the same, Mr. Edwards. You've had an arduous job in my defense, and have carried it through nobly. No one ever had more active or loyal defenders. I can't tell you how I feel all your kindness. And it does you all the more credit, you must permit me to say, because, as I'm fully aware, I don't carry your political sympathies with me. I'm more grateful than I can express." He wrung the attorney's hand.

CHAPTER XXX

THE WIFE'S VICTORY

FRIEND was exceedingly anxious to see his wife; and her relations had spared no pains to obtain permission for her to visit him. He was guarded with great rigor, both on account of the gravity of his offense and his character for resource and courage; but the influence of Dr. Bentley procured leave for Mrs. Friend to be admitted. The ill-tempered turnkey brought her in. Friend looked anxiously to see if he had treated her to any foul language or rudeness; but he seemed to be behaving with unwonted civility. She threw herself on her husband's breast. He was kept ironed and in handcuffs, and could not catch her in his arms. "Ah, Polly, Polly! It is good to see you again!"

"I'll wait outside," said the turnkey. "By rights I hadn't ought to let you out o' my sight; it's the orders as one o' us has always to be here; but you'd as lief be by yourselves, I dare say; and you'll be all right if I keep my eye on the door."

"He's uncommonly considerate," said Friend as the door closed behind him. "Ah, Polly, the sight of you makes this place feel like home. Let me see your face, sweet. My poor little woman, how you have suffered!"

"Everyone has been very good to me. But you; have you suffered? You are not in the least changed."

"You've had enough for the two of us, I'm afraid, dearest. My poor little love! Were you very anxious?"

"Anxious? What a question! But I forget everything now I am with you again."

"And are Dr. and Mrs. Bentley good to you?"

"They are like angels, dearest. Nothing could be kinder."

"Bless them for it! I owe them gratitude for that. My poor little Polly; it hurts me to see how I've made you suffer. But cheer up, dearest; I'm not past hope yet. I've still a plan or two in my head that may save us yet, if you'll help me."

"I help you?"

"Yes, love; it'll be a comfort to you to be doing something, won't it? It's the sitting still and waiting that tries one. Well, it's not much of a chance; but we must try everything. I want you to get an audience of the king and beg for my life, doing the despairing widow business, you know—dishevelled hair and tears and all the rest of it. A petition's no good; there's not a soul who would sign a petition for me; but you all by yourself, Polly, would be more irresistible than a score of petitions. Just your very solitariness would tell."

She raised her head abruptly from his shoulder with a movement of uncontrollable repulsion, but remained silent. "Dear," she said gently at last, "is it because I lied for you that you think I am capable of this?"

He misunderstood her. "Why, Polly, you'd do it capitally. You'd look so taking, no one could resist you. You've only to let yourself go; there's hardly any acting even about it. Oh, yes, you're capable of it!"

"That I am not," she said, rising from his knee. "Carried away by my fears for you, in the terror of the moment I was false to my principles; I did lie; but this is a different thing. What do you take me for that you should propose such baseness to me?"

"What, Polly? You won't? Not to save your poor old husband's neck?"

“It must not be saved—in such a way. What are you made of that you can dream of such a thing? What! after you have spent your life in defying and betraying your king, to creep to him in the end whining for pardon? You knew when you first begun your treason that the penalty was death; why do you shrink from paying? You know that you deserve it. Take the fate you have earned like a man.”

“Of course I shall take it like a man if there's no avoiding it; but you don't expect I shall let myself be hanged if I can help it? A man is bound to make a fight for his life, Polly.”

“To fight for his life—yes; but how shall he fight against justice? And the plan you propose is not fighting. You do not even mean to carry it out yourself.”

“No; I couldn't, somehow, even if there were a chance of success, which there wouldn't be. I don't know why, but some absurd feeling would prevent me. But you—you'd have a chance; and if it gets me off, what does it matter how it's done? And why on earth shouldn't a wife beg for her husband's life?”

“What, when I know you? when I know how little you care, how little you repent? With what face do you think I could ask for your pardon? On what grounds should I plead? Do you want me to urge my wretchedness, my broken heart? That was broken long ago, husband, when I first found out the truth about you. What makes my misery is not that you should suffer, but that you should be guilty. It would be your last, your greatest shame if you should make of your wife's wretchedness a screen behind which you sneak from justice.”

“But I say, Polly, it's death that's in the case. It's all very well to talk about shame and justice; but it's my last chance. If you want me to reform I must manage to keep alive; and by God this is the only way.”

"You must not keep alive, husband. You have got to die. It is the only honest thing, the only manly thing. You must hang."

He stared at her in amazement, half-incredulous of his ears and eyes.

"Is it you that says this to me, Polly?" he asked. "Is it my little wife who tells me to hang? Are you tired of me, then?"

"Tired of you!" she exclaimed. "It is because I love you—because even here where you stand the guiltiest wretch in the three kingdoms, I would be proud of you still! Can't you see? Can't you understand? I do want you to be hanged, because I want you to be worthy of my love; because I want a man and not a cur for my husband."

He stood transfixed, staring at her; admiration gaining on his astonishment. She seemed to glow, to float before his eyes, to be transfigured into something superhuman. He gazed till the contagion of her spirit caught him and whirled him off his feet. He bent before her, sweeping her a bow.

"Madam, your most obedient humble servant," he said in a low voice that thrilled a little. "Yours to command till death." He stooped over her hand and raised it to his lips. "For life or death; whichever you shall choose for me, Polly."

She smiled proudly. "It is death, then, dear. Death for both of us. We'll have no more of dishonor."

He stood holding her hand at arm's length, devouring her with his eyes, lost in wonder as if in a new world. "Polly! Polly!" he murmured now and then below his breath. She drew closer to him. "Dearest," she said. "I knew I could trust you."

She led him to the bench and they sat down again. She lifted his handcuffed wrists and drew his arm over her head so that it lay on her shoulders.

"Polly," he said presently. "Tell me, little woman, what you really think of me. Am I truly such a hopeless rascal?"

She pressed closer to him in silence for a minute.

"Well, Polly?"

"It is not that you chose to serve France instead of England. I don't blame you for that. It is not that you sold information and made use of people for your own ends, and passed yourself off for other than you were. It may be justifiable to do such things, for great and good aims. I cannot tell, though I should not like to do them. But, that you lived a life of lies; that you sought to deceive, not for any worthy object but for your own personal advantage; that you put your own sordid gains above honesty and truth;—this, dearest, makes you a traitor not only to England but to the whole of humanity." She purposely avoided what she felt to be her strongest argument, the religious one, because she felt he could not respond to it.

"I don't think I understand you, dear."

"What is it you don't understand?"

"Well, why might it be justifiable to pass myself off for other than I was, and yet I'm a traitor to humanity because I did it? And what do you mean by a traitor to humanity?"

"Why, I suppose it is not always incumbent on every man to appear exactly as he is. It is certainly better if he does; yet need a man be held guilty for having reserves or concealments? But I am running into casuistry; and if I say that we ought not to blame, I do not mean we ought to imitate. You did much more than this, dearest. And when I call you a traitor to humanity, I mean that not only have you betrayed your nation, but that you have been false to the first obligation of every living man, to tell the truth and to deceive no one. For the whole of human intercourse is founded on the

trust we put in each other's words and deeds; and he who robs us of that trust, he who teaches us to doubt and to disbelieve—he is weakening the bonds which join man to man; he is loosening the whole fabric of our brotherhood; he is a traitor to the hopes of mankind for all the future.”

He sighed. “You’re too deep for me, Polly. I’ve never thought about human intercourse and all that. However, I suppose a man ought to tell the truth and live fair and square and above-board. I can see that much.”

He remained silent, and she said no more.

“Dearest,” she began presently, “Will North and Susan are in great sorrow on account of you. He blames himself bitterly for your fate.”

“Why, they ought to rejoice at it,” said Friend. “Has Susan softened to me? I could see poor Will had a bad time of it at the trial; it was certainly a stiff ordeal for him; but the little lady is made of stronger stuff.”

“She has forgotten everything except her Daddy Friend. She was sadly unhappy because you did not recognize her at the trial.”

“How could I before all her new friends? I was delighted to see the child looking so handsome and elegant in her fine new clothes; she’ll be one of the beauties of the day if all goes well. We must take care not to compromise them, Polly.”

“But they care nothing for their grand acquaintances, love. Susan escaped from them after the trial, and came home to me distracted with grief.”

“But look here, love, we must not let them injure themselves by showing sympathy with me. It won’t do at all. I’m the most detested criminal in the kingdom; it would ruin anyone’s reputation to stand up for me publicly. We’ve succeeded in getting them into a com-

fortable and respectable position; they musn't throw it away now for an absurd romantic sentiment."

"Don't call it an absurd romantic sentiment, love. Poor Will is overwhelmed with grief and self-reproach."

"What does the lad reproach himself for? He has no reason to love me. I fooled him all along: he should look on me as his enemy."

"He does not, dear. He has forgotten everything but your goodness to him. For you have been a friend to him, you must admit."

"A queer kind of friend. I twist him round my little finger and make him my tool, and now he supposes he has got to be grateful! Can't he see that his profit lies in hating me?"

"He would scorn to make profit by his enmity, dear, even if he felt hate towards you. But he feels nothing but love. Was it nothing to him that you would not permit him to be tortured at the trial?"

"He's a fine, generous-hearted lad; but I wish he were not so romantic."

"Dearest, he is full of remorse and grief. Send him a comforting message; send him your forgiveness."

"Forgiveness is all rubbish between him and me. If anyone needs forgiveness it is not he but I. But you can tell him from me that he was perfectly right in denouncing me. In fact, there was nothing else to be done; he'd have put his own neck into the noose if he had not. I don't bear him any grudge. It's my own doing that I am here, not his."

"Yes, dearest. And have you no more to say? You don't know how sore and crushed his heart is. Tell him you forgive him; it will cheer him more than anything else."

"Foolish fellow, what does he want cheering for? He fought for his own hand as a man ought to do. Well, perhaps that won't seem much consolation to him;

after all, his position is not quite pleasant. Heaven knows it's not for me to forgive him, but if the poor dear fellow will feel the happier for it, tell him I forgive him with all my heart and soul. But he must do the same by me. Will you tell him that, Polly? Don't let the children fret, Polly. They ought to forget about me; I can't bear to think that I shall be a shadow on their lives."

"Dearest, your memory will burn like a light in their souls. The world may say of you what it likes; but we three know you, and to us the thought of you will bring strength and comfort to the end of our days."

"Don't talk like that, Polly!" he said in discomfort. "You know it's absurd. I'm just an ordinary rascal, with rather more brains than most, perhaps; which I suppose only makes my case worse, because it has enabled me to carry my mischief to a height beyond the rest."

"Have you not then, dearest, a spark of love for your cause—of loyalty to your master? Surely you really feel an admiration towards the French Emperor—you have wished to be a true servant to him?"

"I've only been true so far, Polly, that hitherto it has been to my interest to keep in with him. Yes; one can't help admiring the fellow; he has a head on his shoulders. After all, he's the only man in Europe it's any satisfaction to work for. All the others—Pitt included—are such hopeless fools! But there's something mean and nasty about him at the same time. He sets one's teeth on edge, somehow—leaves a bad taste in one's mouth, like the savor of brass."

"And you would have betrayed him too?"

"Yes, the minute I saw my profit in it. We're all like that in politics, Polly."

"No, no, no, dear! You must not think that."

"Well, anyhow there are plenty to keep me in counten-

ance, Polly, though most of them do manage to avoid the gallows."

"But, dearest, if you had your life to live over again, would you do just the same?"

"How can I tell, dear? I suppose I should. I took what seemed to me the best course, and I suppose it would seem the best again. I know one thing: I'd manage better; I'd not be caught a second time."

"And is that all you are sorry for, that you have been caught?"

"What's the use of being sorry? It can't change what's past. It seems to me, dearest, to be a sort of weakness, the minute you have failed to turn round and lament what you have done. A man shouldn't turn his back on his own actions."

"You are right, my love. So you must die for yours."

"Well, dearest, if you think it's right I should die, I'm willing. There's no fear I'm afraid, Polly."

"I know, my dearest. There is no weakness of that kind about you."

"It wasn't that I feared being hanged, you know, Polly. Of course, no one wants to be hanged; but if it comes to that, I can stand it as well as any man. Only it went against me to feel that I was giving up before I need—that I was not making the best fight I could. I shouldn't like old Mountstephen and the rest to think they had quelled me."

"Never mind them, my love."

"Well, I must put them out of my head. But you know, Polly, it would be a pleasure to me to have it out with old Mountstephen. From the minute he took his seat on the Bench one could see he was thirsting for my blood."

"Dearest, he has reason for thinking ill of you. And if he let his personal feeling stand between him and justice, show yourself his superior by putting off all

ill-will to him yourself. You can rise above petty ill-feeling and resentment."

"What an angel you are, Polly! If I'm anything but the lowest of rascals, it's your doing. Well, the old man is safe from me now. Let him sleep in peace; you've saved him. You shall do with me exactly what you like. I'm in your hands now."

She seized her opportunity. "Ah, dearest, if I have any influence with you, if I am anything to you, you know what I would ask? If I could only see you turn to the Light before you die, and asking pardon for your sins——"

He was silent for a while. "I'm afraid I'm not made for repentance, Polly," he answered slowly. "I'd do anything to please you, dearest; but a man can't feel in any way but the one that's natural to him. I'm willing to pay for what I've done; I'll own that it's just I should suffer; but that's all; I can't go any further than that."

"But, dearest, you have sinned against God. Your whole future in Eternity depends upon your repentance."

"Can't we leave my future in Eternity till it arrives, dear? You know, frankly speaking, all this doesn't seem real to me. I've no doubt the next world exists, and all that; but this one has always been enough for me, and I have never troubled my head about the other. And to begin now to try and get up some concern about my soul doesn't really strike me as a nice sort of thing to do. I've taken my course and I must pay for it; to try to cry off at the last minute seems to me simply meanness."

"You don't understand, my love," she said in deep pain. "It's not to cry off from your punishment. I don't want you to do that; I want you to see that you have sinned."

"Well, dear, I don't dispute it. I don't look on these

things with your eyes, but I never set up to defend my conduct."

"Then can you not, dearest—can you not confess it to God and implore pardon? Think, my love. Our whole future together depends on it."

"Polly, dearest, I would do anything for you. But how can I do this? I must say that the idea of God doesn't seem real to me. It's all words without any meaning. I've never taken the slightest interest in these things, and they really don't seem to belong to me or touch me in the least."

"But you do not disbelieve, dear, surely?"

"No, I suppose not. I'm sure at least that you know all about it. Of course, you know what's true; but then believing it's true is so different from feeling it real. Perhaps in the next world things will be different, dear, and I shall see it then as you do. I suppose if God wants me to change He can make me; but I can't change myself."

"It will be too late—too late," she said. She tried to set her faith before him convincingly, tried to awaken him to a sense of its reality, but in vain. She found herself only provoking criticisms of her creed, shrewd remarks of earthly common-sense whose unintentional blasphemy filled her with horror. She could only implore him to be silent, and take refuge herself in fervent prayers that his eyes might be opened. His own fate had no more power than hers to move him.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE BIRTH OF A SOUL

AFTER his wife had left, Manning, the civillier of the two turnkeys, was on duty, and left Friend to his own reflections on perceiving him disinclined to talk; but in the evening Jackson, the surly one, returned. His language was revolting and spiteful beyond endurance. All that he could do and say to insult and torment he did. The other man tried to restrain him. Then he began jeering at him for his ill-humor. "Amusing fellow he is, ain't he, Mr. Friend? A sweet temper he's in to-night. I know what's the matter with him. It's all along of a blasted kid of his that he's making this fuss; the brat's been lying sick of a gaol fever this se'nnight; expect he's just gone off the twig. Ain't that so, Jack? Has your blooming bastard kicked the bucket?"

"Shut you d—d mouth!" shouted the other.

"Would you believe it, Mr. Friend, that a man could make such a fuss about a blasted bastard?"

"Bastard let him be, he's my own flesh and blood, and that's more than you can say of any of your wife's brats," roared Jackson. He proceeded to stigmatize the lady referred to in language that will not bear reproduction. Friend had to interfere to prevent a fight. Manning finally took himself off. Friend inquired of Jackson if the story were true, and how the child was doing. When he found Friend was not mocking him his surliness dropped from him, and he poured out his trouble with

an abandon which showed the depth of his suffering. "Only five year old, sir, and the brightest little chap! He's the image of me, and can knock down any kid of his own age. And there he lies, all his curls cut off, and he don't know us, and hasn't said a word o' sense these three days, and he's worse every time I goes to look at him."

"Who's looking after him?" asked Friend.

"His mother, sir. She's a good mother to him, whatever she may be. What'll happen to her if the boy goes I can't think."

"And have you any advice for him, any physician in attendance?"

"We've had the apothecary to look at him; but bless you, sir, they won't put their foot into the place a second time. 'Tisn't a place to ask a gen'leman into."

"Where is it?"

"A room in Little Green Street, sir, just behind the Old Bailey, looking over the debtors' yard."

"Now look here," said Friend. "You must get him away from there. Get a clean airy lodging for him; lose no time about it; and call in a good physician to see him. I'll give you the address of Dr. Thompson, who has attended my family; he's a kind-hearted man who'll do his utmost for the child, and won't bother the mother for her marriage certificate. I think I know a woman who could let you a room. Mrs. Haines, 16 Crown Street, Clerkenwell. You go to her and mention my name to her, and I think for old friendship's sake she'll let you have a room. She'll look after you well if she does."

"But look here, sir; we're poor folks, and this'll cost——"

"Never you mind about that. I'll see to all that. You go and get the room, and get the boy out of Little Green Street. A few guineas more or less is nothing to

me; I shall have no further use for money after next week."

"God A'mighty bless you, sir!" said Jackson, the tears in his eyes. "If my kid recovers——"

"Keep up your heart, man. Children pick up again in a marvelous manner. But look here, friend; if Mrs. Haines takes you in, you must mind your manners. She won't like any foul language in her house. And you'd better say nothing about the missing wedding lines, d'you see? Call her your wife for the time."

"Bless you, sir, she's been as good as my wedded wife these last five years. Ever since the boy was born we've been as much married as if we was joined by the Archbishop of Canterbury himself in St. Paul's Cathedral."

"Well, if that's so, why don't you get the parson to join you now? I'm sure you'd find it would please her to be made an honest woman of. And then you'd have something to say when the other fellows call her names."

"I never thought on it, sir; I've never held much with marriage myself. But I'm sure we're as good as married if it comes to that; and whatever she was when I took her, she's been a good woman to me, and a better mother to the little chap you couldn't find if you was to search till Christmas."

"You think of what I say. You'll never repent it, I'll be bound. And lose no time to-morrow in getting him out of Little Green Street."

"God A'mighty bless you, sir. I'll think o' what you say. I'm sure, if there's anything I can do for you—— I'm sorry I behaved to you as I did, sir; I was near off my head with fretting about the little chap."

"That's all right, Jackson. You let me know how he goes on."

The interest he took in the jailer's family proved a great resource to him; for having abandoned the idea of further struggles for life he began to feel his position. Every day he asked after the boy. They succeeded in obtaining Mrs. Haines' room and brought Dr. Thompson to visit him there. Under the influence of fresh air and cleanliness he began to recover. It was touching to see the gratitude of the jailer who had been so savagely brutal. He could not do enough to express his devotion. Friend again urged him to marry, and eventually got him to consent. What with this return to respectability and the discipline of restraining his tongue so as not to offend the good woman who was lodging them, it seemed likely that Jackson would become a reformed character.

Now that action was at an end Friend could no longer keep at bay the enemy he had repulsed during his whole life, reflection; but he found, rather to his surprise, that it had lost most of its venom. He perceived that his dread of thought had been in reality a dread of his own conscience, just as the care with which he had kept his doings secret from his wife showed his fear of her judgment. Looking back over his life in the light of her standpoint, he saw it clearly, and without shrinking pronounced it a mistake. But he was not going to bewail or repent. "It's no use whining over the past; my business is to make the best I can of what is left," said Friend to himself. He set himself to go through all that remained so as to do credit to his wife's teaching. He determined that no one should see in him a sign of gloom or depression; that he would keep up his spirits as well as his courage, and not only betray no weakness but fill the days with all the kind deeds and words that opportunity allowed. It was not easy in the gloom and closeness and foul odors of his cell in Newgate, vilely fed, and his wrists galled by the handcuffs into

open sores. But if the task taxed his strength, no one could suspect the struggle, for it was successful.

The ordinary of Newgate, who visited him with well-meant but entirely conventional attempts to bring him to repentance, could make nothing of him. He acknowledged that he was glad his attempt had failed; he showed satisfaction on learning that the French fleet had never succeeded in entering the Channel, and that Napoleon, abandoning the idea of immediate invasion, had left Boulogne; but as for any personal penitence, he repudiated it utterly. Finally he requested the ordinary to cease his visits. "You mean excellently, my dear sir; but your efforts are quite thrown away upon me. I'm not the stuff for you. Leave me to face my own fate." And then, "I must confess, sir, I have an invincible objection to strangers meddling with my most private concerns. I beg pardon for speaking so plainly; I know it's your profession to meddle; but that's the state of my feeling. If there's anything to be done for me I must do it myself." He felt a deep resentment that these intruders should venture on his wife's ground.

The ordinary took leave of him with sighs and shakings of the head. "Hard as a rock and fearless as the devil himself," was his description; "without doubt a lost soul." Dr. Bentley, influenced by Mrs. Friend, had not pressed his offices upon him.

The governor of Newgate himself came to tell him of the arrival of the death-warrant. Friend took it without the slightest alteration in his composure. "His Majesty is graciously pleased to remit all the concluding part of your sentence," said the governor. "You will be hanged in the usual fashion, and your body sent to Surgeons' Hall to be anatomized."

"Ah, thanks; I am much obliged to his Majesty," said Friend. "The twentieth! That's strange."

"What, the date? I am afraid no alteration can be made now."

"I don't wish for any alteration. Then twentieth is as good a date as any other; in fact, there's a sort of appropriateness about it, perhaps." He did not explain himself; the twentieth of September was in fact the anniversary of his wedding-day.

He was not allowed to see his wife again till the nineteenth. He was kept heavily ironed and constantly guarded; but when the last day came and her visit was announced, he was permitted to see her in private and his handcuffs were taken off. The last was an indulgence granted by Jackson on his own responsibility; but every one who came in contact with him was eager to do their utmost for his comfort.

She flew into his arms. They embraced speechlessly. The minutes passed unheeded. Friend was the first to speak.

"Well, Polly, it is meat and drink to me to see you. I have hungered for your dear face day and night. Why, my little woman, your hair has turned gray!"

"Has it, dear? You have not changed. There is not a line on your face; you are absolutely the same, your own beloved self, thank God!"

"But, dearest, what have you been doing? Have you been fretting about me? You look quite an old woman. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Only praying to God day and night for your beloved soul," she answered. "Dearest, you don't expect that I can go through this and not feel it?"

"No, dear, you must feel it, I suppose; but I don't want you to fret about it."

"To fret about it! It's not quite that dear. I am dying of it."

"No, no, Polly," he said hurriedly. "Don't say that! I can't have your death to answer for."

"No, dear you have not. It is not your doing. But I was never strong you know, my love; and how could you think I could live without you? What else do you think I meant when I bid you die?"

"Polly! Polly!" he groaned.

"Look here, my dearest," he said in a moment, trying to recover himself. "You must cheer up. It's not so bad a case as it might be, eh? We both know that it's perfectly fair and just that I should die, don't we? And I am not fretting about it in the least. I assure you that I am perfectly reconciled to it. You are not troubling yourself about my sufferings? For you know I don't care in the slightest what they do to me. I'm a tough customer—hard as nails: I really can say of myself I'm indifferent to physical pain. Whatever it's like, I can bear it easily. So don't trouble yourself about that, dearest love."

"I know your courage, dear; I know your strength. It is not that."

"Well, dearest, when we are both agreed that it is what ought to happen you can bear up, can't you? Think of me, love; think of what I must feel if I've got to think I've killed you. Spare me that, Polly!" His voice shook.

"You have not killed me, dearest; don't think that. It is not ours to give and take life. But don't you see how much better it is that we should die together? What should I do without you, even supposing I lost you in some ordinary way? And now, what sort of life do you imagine could be mine? God is good, dearest, to release me so that I can still be with you."

"Polly did you notice the day? The twentieth; it is our wedding-day."

"Yes, dearest; it is a sign to me that we may be permitted to die together. To-morrow I hope will unite us more firmly than that day fourteen years ago."

"Fourteen years, Polly, since we were married?"

"Fourteen years here, dearest. And Eternity there. Promise me it shall be so, husband."

"Polly, what am I to say to you? I would give my soul for you; but I can't do this."

"What, dearest? What is your difficulty?"

"To pray—when it's not real to me—when I don't believe—or at least I suppose I believe, but when it means nothing to me. How can I, dearest? It would be a mockery."

"God will make it real to you, husband. I leave you to Him. He will grant your soul to my prayers."

"Well, dearest, if ever the moment comes when I can, I will do as you bid me. Tell me what I am to say." She told him. She had no more fears for him; she felt certain of victory. Glowing with faith and hope she poured out her beliefs to him. He listened with a deepening sense of the distance between them, of the impossibility of obtaining her standpoint. Elevated and fervent as her religion was, her creed had a childlike crudity about it which repelled him. She felt his want of sympathy through his silence, and presently stopped.

"Thank you, dearest," he said. "Well, we must leave it there. You have my promise that if ever I find it possible, I will pray to be forgiven."

"Tell me, dearest," she said presently, "you have forgiven all your enemies? You have forgiven Lord Mountstephen?"

"I believe I'd forgotten all about him, Polly. He's not worth thinking of, is he? But it's not for me to blame him. He might have been a better man if I had not put temptation in his way. Leave him alone to settle his own account. I wish the old man no evil. Dear Susan; I hope he'll be good to her. Give her my love, Polly, my dearest love. Will too. I hope they'll be

happy together. Dear children; I wonder what they will make of this puzzling affair called life?"

"One more question, love. Would you still say you would do the same if you had to live your life over again?"

"If I could meet you at the beginning of it, it would be very different, Polly. I didn't know you till I was over thirty, and had taken my course. I started wrong. I was brought up to think myself defrauded by the world, and that all I could do against it was fair. No; if I could have another chance I'd try for something very different. Perhaps I shall be allowed it over there."

Darkness had stolen upon them. The warders had gone their evening rounds. They had left Friend undisturbed till the last; and the two turnkeys had been waiting for half an hour, unwilling to cut short his last meeting with his wife. At last Manning knocked at the door.

"Is it time—is it time?" she asked, trembling.

"Polly, Polly; how am I to part with you?"

She threw herself into his arms, and they remained locked in an interminable embrace. At every thought of parting she clung the tighter to him; she could not tear herself away. Waves of anguish, immeasurable, unspeakable, rooled over him; a flood in which all that he knew of himself was lost: all but the instinctive grasp at self-control. Her utmost sufferings were light in comparison with what he endured, now that the depths were reached.

As for her, she could feel no grief while his arms were yet around her: she was rapt in a transport that made sorrow all one with joy.

At last he put her from him. "You must go, dear," he said very gently. She obeyed him. They kissed in silence; silently she withdrew to the door, their eyes fixed on each other to the last. He smiled at her as she

felt for the doorway, with a look she had never seen on his face—a look that she treasured for the rest of her days as a revelation; a smile of infinite strength, infinite tenderness—infinately sad.

The door interposed between them. With the loss of his glance her senses forsook her, and she fell fainting to the ground.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE END

FRIEND was led back to the condemned cell, briefly refusing a last offer of Dr. Forde's, the ordinary, to sit with him, and requesting the turnkeys to leave him to himself. He stood motionless in the cell, battling with his anguish. Light had come at last. He saw, as he had never seen before, even when most fully yielding to the influence of his wife's spirit, the sacredness of life. He recognized the divinity of the moral claim to which he had been so blind. At the onrush of realization, he threw up his head and squared his shoulders and set his teeth. But little by little his head drooped, his shoulders relaxed. At last he dragged himself to the bench and sat down.

It was a sultry night. The weather had shown no sign of cooling though the summer was far advanced. Day after day burned overhead, and there was little relief when darkness came. On this night the sky was overcast and very dark; there was thunder in the atmosphere. It was difficult to breathe in Newgate; the air stagnated. Hour after hour struck.

He lived over again the past scenes; most of all, the last interview with his wife. He longed passionately to send her the comfort she craved, to let her know that her desire was accomplished; but the whole weight of his nature was against it. The thought of prayer was immensely, unspeakably repugnant to him.

The thought of his future, though he was quite willing to accept her belief that his fate to eternity depended on a formal expression of submission, did not disturb him in the least; it was too unreal to him. He was incapable of forming any idea of a future life, entirely destitute of imagination as he was. He was content to suppose that justice would be done, and that if justice demanded eternal punishment for his lot, his part was to acquiesce with cheerfulness. But that his wife should be suffering more than the pangs of Hell in the thought of his damnation was an agony he could not endure. And his mind argued that he had no reason for his resistance, since he owned the existence of a God against whom he had sinned. It was not pride that stood in his way; he fully admitted the magnitude of his offense. Yet to approach the presence of a God he did not know with the mockery of a prayer that his heart was incapable of feeling, was an impossibility.

He recalled his wife's sketch of her faith only to feel with greater force the impossibility of its ever becoming his own. The Saviour she depicted was a feminine creation; her creed was full of tender feminine absurdities and intellectual inconsistencies. The conventional views of the orthodox preachers inspired him with nothing but aversion. If time had been given him, he might under the new stress of late-awakened faculties have evolved a religion for himself; but such a thing was not possible to be accomplished in a few short hours, burdened as his mind was with the recognition of his wasted life.

The night grew late. Closer and heavier grew the foul air. A deep snoring vibrated through the stillness; and the moans of a restless sleeper in the next cell, doomed to the same passage that awaited him in a few more hours. Still the struggle continued.

The storm burst. Thunder crashed overhead and

rolled reverberating against the thick walls. The lightning blazed on the squalid cell, which the darkness instantly snatched back to itself. The rain roared down. A sense of freshness penetrated even there. He breathed more freely. The tension seemed to give way; his stubborn will relaxed. "After all, it's the right thing," he said. "I ought to do it."

Standing, his head bowed, his hands tightly clasped, he uttered the words: "God forgive me my sins, for Christ's sake. Amen."

He felt it to be perfunctory, but it gave him deep relief. He had done his duty. Now his wife would rest in peace.

He stretched himself on the bench. The thunder crashed and rolled unheeded; the rain fell fast and heavy, bringing a welcome coolness to the air. In a few minutes he was fast asleep.

He slept soundly till he was awakened by the turnkey at half-past six. The last night's agony had left him; he was again cheerful and calm. He had need of strength, for a hoarse and hostile murmur already surged round the prison like a sea, and now and then yells of rage, or his name shouted in tones of frenzy, reached his ears. He did not mind. He made a good breakfast; chatted with the jailers, and inquired particularly after Jackson's wife and child. The under-turnkey was almost in tears. "God bless you, Mr. Friend, sir. God ha' mercy on you, sir. I shall never forget you and all as you have done for me and mine. An' if my missus ever has another child, we'll call him after you, sir."

"You had better not," said Friend, smiling. "You might as well call him Old Nick at once. Mine will be the worst hated name in England for many a year to come; ay, and as long as it is remembered. Keep it for your own recollections if you will, my friend; but don't breathe the name of John Friend aloud."

Dr. Bentley arrived. Mrs. Friend had implored him to be there to bring her an account of her husband's last moments; and though he felt he could do little good he could not deny her. It was as he thought. Friend's refusal was gentler than it had been, but he would not accept the offer of any religious ministrations. "My dear sir, no one can help me here; what is to be done I must do myself," he said. "You don't believe that any one's intervention can really be of avail?"

"Ah, as to that——" said Dr. Bentley.

"Tell my wife I have done what I could. I have done as she asked me; she may be happy about me. Tell her so, Dr. Bentley; it will comfort her.

"I will give her your message. I hope—I trust it signifies that your heart has been touched, that you are no longer turning away from the offered mercy. If you can tell me so, what a load it will take from our hearts!"

"Don't let your hearts be weighed down on my behalf, Dr. Bentley. I am quite satisfied that whatever my fate may be, it will be the only right and fitting one. Can you not trust me to Justice?"

Dr. Bentley pressed his hand.

"I can't tell you, Dr. Bentley, what I feel towards you and Mrs. Bentley for your goodness to my wife. I owe you more than I can express. And if I could, I believe I should do best to hold my tongue; I'm only too well aware that the thanks of a man like me can only be a disgrace to you. I wish—but it's no use wishing. I can't say anything; words are no good: only I must try—I must let you know. . . . With my last breath I shall be blessing you!" Dr. Bentley wrung his hand fervently.

The sheriff tapped at the door. It was a quarter to eight. He was led out to the press-yard to have his irons knocked off. He shook his wrists with a sigh of relief and a smile as the handcuffs fell from them. The

attendants and many of the prisoners crowded round him to take leave of him; the governor himself shook hands with him. He bade farewell to each by name. "Good-by, Manning; thanks, friend, for all your kindness to me. Good-by, Jackson. My best wishes for that boy of yours; bring him up to be something better than an Old Bailey gallows-bird. God bless you, friend." He shook his hand with a warm and hearty grip. Jackson burst out blubbering, and bolted to hide his tears.

The executioner advanced to tie his arms. His elbows were fastened together behind his back and his wrists bound with cord. His face throughout was cheerful and serene.

The roar of the crowd without increased as the hour approached; it sounded like wild beasts ravenous for their prey. As the procession emerged from the prison on the platform outside the debtors' door where the gallows was erected, a yell that seemed to shake the roofs went up from the multitude assembled. A shower of missiles flew against the prisoner—dead cats, rotten cabbages, addled eggs, filth of all kinds. "Warm work, sir," observed Friend to the sheriff who was receiving his share of the favors. "We had better make haste."

It was necessary; the crowd made a rush at the scaffold, at which it shook in every joint. It was obvious they would brook no delay. He was placed below the beam, the noose slipped over his head. Dr. Bentley hurried to his side for his last words. "I'm sorry you should come in for all this, Dr. Bentley. It's too good of you. You'll tell Polly I thought of her to the last, won't you? Tell her I died perfectly happy and contented; and you'll not forget to tell her that I have done as she wanted? You will take care of her, won't you, Dr. Bentley?" Tears, unknown there before forced themselves to his eyes.

"God bless you, Friend—God receive you."

“Good-by, Dr. Bentley—good-by.”

He recovered his cheerfulness with an effort. “Now, my friend, I’m ready for you,” he said to the executioner. “Don’t let us keep the audience waiting. They’re impatient for the performance to begin.” The cap was drawn over his face.

Eight o’clock was striking as the executioner left him to do his work. He counted the strokes; how many should he hear? He had not reached the third when the plank he stood on quivered; it gave way beneath his feet; down he went, to be brought up with a dislocating wrench and sense of strangling. Maddened by suffocation and the intolerable strain on his neck he tore against his bonds, fighting for his life. Suddenly the thought struck him that to yield his life was what he was there for; that he had promised his wife to die with willingness. He wrestled now for death, against the powerful instincts that bade him struggle, forcing himself to bear what nature found unbearable. A wave of scarlet darkness blotted out consciousness: as it returned and his necessity grew yet more desperate he took a firmer grip of self-command, trying in vain to control the convulsions of his limbs; yet not the less did his mind still rule, bent on death, on expiation. He felt the eyes burst from his head, the swollen tongue like a piece of dry leather far beyond its bounds, without a sensation of pain, hardly with discomfort; the plunges of his chest against suffocation, the tearing strain on his neck to rending point, were all he could attend to—together with the fierce resolve to master the rebellion of nature, to accept the agony, to force it to serve his purpose of atonement. “Fool, it is only death; take it like a man; take what you have earned like a man,” he bade himself; and there was a stern joy in the conflict. Consciousness wavered, flickered like the flame of a candle in the wind; he came to himself after the fraction of a second with

a sense of return from vast interminable distances, absence stretching through eternities—and yet with a clearness and nearness of recollection, a warm familiarity of knowledge, a more vivid self-consciousness than he had ever experienced in his life. And with the quick realization of himself came a perception of exhaustion, of finality; he was at the end of his powers; he had no longer strength to suffer; the struggle continued, but as it were outside himself, apart from his consciousness. “There’s some poor wretch theme making a great fight for his life,” he thought, indistinctly knowing it was himself. “As for me, I’ve done my part; I’m through with it; I can’t feel any more. This is death.” And with the thought a great wave of thankfulness and triumph lifted him up. “I’ve kept my word; I’ve won the victory; Polly——” and the wave swept him out exulting into the darkness before the thought could conclude itself.

But to the spectators his limbs were still agitated; it was nine minutes by the sheriff’s watch before the last sign of life had departed.

He died very hard. They said the rope that bound his arms behind him had broken in his struggles. He was a man of extraordinary muscular power.

His wife survived him for seven weeks.

JUL 7, 1909.

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